The Seen and Unseen at Stratford-on-Avon

W. D. HOWELLS

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AT
STRATFORD-ON-AVON

A Fantasy

BY
W. D. HOWELLS

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CHAPTER I

We lingered amidst the pleasant avenues and crescents of Cheltenham, chiefly taken with the stately old-fashioned Parade, where, overlooking a Roman fountain, we found an American roof-garden. That is, it called itself a roof-garden, but it was silent about being American, and was really a canopied tea-room, only one flight up from the sidewalk instead of twenty stories; the fountain did not say it was Roman, but it was of a lavish spilth, and tumbled over marble shelves among mythological men and beasts, and so was Roman enough for us. A pleasant wind lifted the leaves up and down the Parade, where we did not mind the repair of the roadway going on with stone-breakers breaking stone, and a steam-roller steam-rolling the pieces into a tarry bed. We could go away from the roof-garden tea-room when we liked, and walk or drive among the lawned and embowered mansions and lodges and villas, and educational establishments for both sexes, and think of our last King, our poor George the Third, who, though he alienated our affections, discovered the virtues of the medicinal waters of Cheltenham, and established the pleasant resort in a favor long

since faded, but all the fitter for the retired Indian officers who now mostly dwell there, and apter to their strictly measured means. We did not personally verify the fact of their residence, for they were away on their holidays, as Englishmen always are at the beginning of August; but there were the large handsome houses of Georgian architecture, and we easily persuaded ourselves that they lived in these when they were at home.

In other words, we were so glad of Cheltenham by day and by night that we doubted very much whether we should hurry on to Stratford-on-Avon for the Shakespearean Festivals, held there throughout the month, on the brink of whose Bank Holiday we trembled. It seemed to us that we could do much better staying in Cheltenham, say a fortnight, with that Roman fountain and American roof-garden for our solace every day, and then go to Stratford; and the very last night of our stay we almost thought we should spend our whole August there, running over to Stratford for certain plays and coming back. What brought us to this conditional decision was our pleasure in the open-air performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in the park under the stars and the stir of leaves overhead, with the fine shiver of the natural and artificial bushes which the actors went and came through. They were very good actors, or at least as good as we deserved, both men and women; and the children that danced bare-legged and gauze-winged as fairies were adorable in that moment when the lovely English children are hesitating about growing plainer instead of simply growing older. We spectators were not in multitude, but we were fairly many, and we seemed to be fairly good society. We were very willing to be pleased with the playing, and we clapped handsomely at any chance, and so almost unanimously that I was a little vexed by the reticence of two gentlemen who sat directly in front of

us and whom I was disposed to wish away at first. But as the time passed I forgot my grievance with them, if it was a grievance, and began to be interested in their peculiar interest in the performance, which they did not hide from me so much as I expected. They were of fairly good height, but one was much bulkier than the other and he seemed somehow of a cheerfuler make, though I imagined this rather from his carriage than from any expression of his face, which, in fact, I could not see at once. They both wore, or appeared to wear, the fashions of a West End tailor; they had on very-well-cut lounge suits, such as Englishmen almost live in when they are not on social duty and may indulge themselves in the excess of informality which the most formal of nations then likes to abandon itself to. But as the time passed their dress seemed to change, in a manner I hardly know how to describe, to something not old-fashioned but out-fashioned. Broad flat collars grew about their necks in place of the limp turn-down outing affairs they had worn; their jackets were replaced by slashed doublets of velvet; their trousers, slightly pegtop, turned to trunk hose. But what was more puzzling was an effect of luminous transparency which their persons now presented. I found that so far from incommoding me by their interposition between me and the play, I could see it none the worse but all the better for their presence, just as I could hear the actors more clearly, or more intelligently, for the talk which the two kept up pretty constantly. I cannot yet quite account for this curious fact (whether it was an illusion or not, I hope it remains a fact of my experience) and I give it to the reader for what it is worth. They sat rather silently through the opening passages of the play, where the lovers were having their misadventures contrived for them, but became restive, both of them, in that long, long scene where Bottom and Snug and Starve-

ling and their brother mechanicals tediously rehearse their parts for the interlude which they are to play before the Duke.

At the end of it the slighter of my neighbors leaned toward the other and said, "It always seemed to me that this was one of the places where you fell down."

"I know," the stout gentleman acknowledged. "But," he said, "it always got a laugh."

"From the groundlings."

"From her Grace herself."

"The taste of her Grace was not always to be trusted. In matters of humor, of fun, it was a little gross, no? A little rank?"

"She certainly had a gust for the high-flavored in anecdote; but I don't know that this scene is exactly of that sort. Coom to think of it, Oi—"

"*Coom? Oi?*" the other challenged.

"*Come* and *I*, Oi *mane*," the stout gentleman owned with a laugh. "I do forget my London accent mostly, now that I've got permanently back to my Warwickshire; it's so easy; after a language a dialect is like slippers after tight shoes. But what I mane—mean—is that I think these mechanicals are fairly decent; much more than they would have been in life. Her Grace would have relished what they would really have said, with the loves of Pyramus and Thisbe for a theme, if I had let them give way to their sprightly fancy without restraint; they had to be held up with a strong hand at times." The comfortable gentleman laughed with a pleasure his companion apparently did not share, though, I fancied, less from a hurt moral sense than from a natural gravity.

"I never liked your bringing such fellows in as you often were doing. They are beneath the dignity of the drama. If you had taken my advice you would certainly have left the Gravedigger out of 'Hamlet'; and your Touchstone

and Audrey—I suppose you'll say they always got a laugh, too. And that fat rascal Falstaff, and that drunken Bardolph, and that swaggering blackguard Pistol—I never could suffer them, though I suffered enough from them." He laughed as at a neat point he had made, and then lapsed into what appeared a habit of melancholy.

"I won't save myself from you behind Nature's farthingale," the other said, gently, "and I'll own that these fellows here are not so amusing as I once thought them. The fashion of fun changes. I've heard that Mark Twain used to say my humor made him want to cry; perhaps in a century or two I shall have my revenge. But now, this scene of Hermia and Helena and their lovers in the forest here, I call that rather nice—their jealous fury, I mean; it has its pathos, too, I think."

"I don't deny it," the gloomier gentleman said. "But I'm not sure I like the passions painted quite so nakedly. I should have preferred a more veiled presentment of these ladies' hate as well as love. But it's good, very good, very good indeed; or, as we used to say, very excellent good. Ah! That was well done of Hermia!"

"Yes," the stout gentleman sighed, acquiescing, "I never saw it done quite so well in my *time*, when we had boys for the part."

He put a certain stress on the word time, as playing upon it, and the other returned in like humor: "Yes; eternity has its compensations, and actresses are of them, though one wouldn't always think so. They're certainly better than those beardless boys of your time."

The stout gentleman laughed dutifully, and the two went on concurrently with the play in their talk.

The play was a good deal cut, as I thought to its advantage, and I began to hope we should escape the scene of Pyramus and Thisbe: it did seem too much to have

it after the rehearsal; and the rest was so charming. But we were not to escape so lightly. Bottom and the rest came on in due course, and I wondered how I should live through the joke. Suddenly I started, as if from sleep, and found that I really had been drowsing.

This will not seem so incredible if I allege that not very long before I had slept through a séance at the dentist's in Boston, while he filled a tooth for me with the delicate skill of American dentists. Any one who can believe this will not doubt that I was saved from that tedious scene by Nature's anesthetic, and that I stood up greatly refreshed, as if the operation had been entirely successful.

The wind that was still lightly fingering the leaves seemed to have grown a little chillier, and a thin cloud had blown over the stars. The people were streaming away from the seats; the scene looked all the emptier for the want of a curtain to hide its hollowness.

"Did you notice what became of those two men in front of us?" I asked. "Or which way they went?"

"What two men in front of us?" it was replied; and I began to think I had invented them in the swift dream I must have had during my life-saving nap. I suppose the reader has guessed at the identity of one of them, and I could have done so myself if I had not been rigidly principled against ever guessing in England about anything; it so unmistakably marks you for an American, and if you are trying to pass for English it is so defeating.

I said no more about the strange companions, but I declared that while I appeared to have been sleeping (as I was now promptly accused of doing) I had been thinking the whole problem over, and had decided that we had better not try to do the August rites of Stratford-on-Avon from Cheltenham, but go at once and settle in that town, and seize whatever advantages propinquity

offered for enjoyment. As nobody objected I began to have some doubts of my decision; but after rather a poor night, and some very disappointing coffee at breakfast, I held firmly to it. I was all the firmer in it when I found that the head porter at our hotel had sent us to the station to take a train which did not go; I then felt that we *must* leave Cheltenham, even if it was not for Stratford. The railway porter who labeled our baggage for Stratford said that the first train leaving before five-forty was a motor-train, which left at three-thirty. I tried to make him tell me what a motor-train was, and he did his best, but fell back upon a solid ground of fact in assuring me that I should see.

CHAPTER II

WHEN I did see the motor-train I was richly content with it, and more content as time (a good deal of time) went on. The train was formed of one long car, with a smoking and a baggage compartment at the forward end, the rest opening airily into a saloon with seats on each side, as in our pleasant day-coaches at home. We had tried in vain to buy first-class tickets, and now we had all this delight at third-class rates, which alone are recognized on motor-trains. We slipped sleekly out of Cheltenham, which tried to detain us at two suburban stations (*halts*, such stops are called on the motor route), and sleekly ran through the grain-fields and meadow-lands and broad-bean patches, where the yellowing wheat stood dense, hanging its blond heads, and the haycocks covered the ground almost as thickly as the unfallen stems, and the lentils blackened in innumerable sheaves, and all the landscape stretched away in dreamy levels to a low horizon, where the afternoon hid them in its mellow mists. There were so few people in the car that we could change from side to side and seat to seat, and when we had done with the landscape we could give ourselves to conjecture of our fellow-passengers. Two of these were ladies, each reading a copy of *The Nation* (the London, not the New York one), and I tried my best to make out from it who and what they were, but I had arrived at no more than the conclusion that they were persons of intellectual as well as social quality, when they rose together from the

place where they were sitting and left the car at I forget just what halt. I followed them with famishing curiosity, but when the train started again I was obliged to try doing what I could with their vacant places.

Then I found that their places were not really vacant, but were taken by the companions who had sat together in front of us at the open-air theater the night before. I was glad to note that by daylight they seemed more substantial than they had looked in the glare of the electric-lamps. It was as if they had chosen to put off whatever had been apparitional about them, and to be plain middle-aged Englishmen of comfortable condition. I observed that the stouter of the two now wore a Norfolk jacket, with knickerbockers and low tan shoes, as if he chose to do something more rustic in his dress than the other, who was dressed as if he had just come down from the waning season in London, and had not yet got into his outing things. I fancied that in this effect he was choosing not to be mixed up in anybody's mind with the Bank-Holiday makers, who were already swarming over the country, and were giving every outward token of having a whole three days off; for it was Saturday afternoon, and Monday would be the great day of all. There was something less than kind in his melancholy, and yet I could not have said that he looked so much unkind as reserved in the bearing by which each of us declares his habitual feeling toward others. It was as if he were not precisely offended by the existence of common men, but incommoded; they kept him not perhaps from thinking of himself, but from thinking of things infinitely more important to him than they were. I was most struck with this sort of aloofness from his species, this philosophic abstraction, when at our coming to Broadway his companion spoke of the different artists who had first colonized the place. I had never been there, but it was dear

to me because my chief association with it was the memory of a many-gifted friend who might have been almost any sort of artist, but chose mainly to be a painter till the sea engulfed him with the others that went down in the *Titanic*. I wondered if I should perhaps see the house where that dear, sunny-eyed F. M. lived, not mattering that I should not know it if I did see it; and I fancied a curious sympathy with my mood in the gayer of the companions which was absent from the gloomier one. It was not so much that he did not care, as that he could not; his thoughts were fixed on those abstractions in which he was himself the center and the sole concrete. I thought that if I had told the first about my friendship with the bright spirit so tragically quenched he would have understood, and would have said, perhaps, the fittingest thing that could be said. But as it was I could only catch a phrase or two of the talk which I tried to eavesdrop, and heard such words as "one of among the many lovely Rosalinds," and "beautiful young American actress," who had come to England, but soon married off the stage, and now lived the genius of that place. It did not seem to interest the other, who remained fallen in a sort of bitter muse, till we reached the station where we changed from our pleasant, roomy motor to the crowded express. The porter ran far forward along the train before he could find places for us, and he had so much difficulty that we began to hope he would be obliged to put us into a first-class compartment with our third-class tickets, when he got seats of the right grade of our transportation, and we rode the rest of the way to Stratford in a car so near the locomotive that it was blind with the smoke and choking with the coal-gas.

It was a very long ride; but suddenly, before we expected, we had arrived, and those two companions stepped out of the car just before us. I heard the stout gentleman

say, cheerily, but with a touch of friendly irony in his words, "Welcome to Stratford, my lord of St. Albans!" If I had then any lingering doubt who the pair were I must have known beyond any misgiving that they were William Shakespeare and Francis Bacon, but why they should have come there together on terms of such incredible reconciliation I shall, perhaps, never be able to make clear to the impartial reader; as for their respective partizans I despair of them absolutely. I wished to seize the friendlier phantasm of the two, and force him to some explanation, and I suppose I must have made a clutch at the incorporal air where I had last seen him; but a vigilant young porter mistook my gesture as an appeal for his help.

He seized our hand baggage, and with the demand, "Any luggage in the van, sir?" hurried us away through the Bank-Holiday makers, already arrived in swarms that Saturday afternoon, and staring about in the distraction which lasted with them for the next sixty hours at least. They thronged the roadways as well as the footways of the old town (which I shall try to keep throughout this narrative from calling quaint), and they would have had my cheap commiseration in their air of vague bewilderment and apprehension of something worse than they were already suffering if I had not been anxious in my doubt whether we should find *The Spotted Pard* all that we had hoped a small hotel might be when we wired for rooms from Cheltenham. The holiday makers stood about in helpless groups, or streamed, men and maids, and mothers and fathers with footsore children at their heels and toes, and mutely made way for the motor we had found at the station offering itself for the same fare as a fly, and now carrying us and our piled-up trunks to *The Spotted Pard* for the one-and-six which at home would have translated themselves into two-and-sixty of our little-buying dollars and cents.

It was such a quiet, kind-looking, patient crowd, so Englishly single-minded and good-tempered, that I was glad to have our chauffeur consider it humanely in his course; and I did not feel it so very molestful as I might in my vision of the streets and houses, which, from once seeing them years before, I now found so familiar. They did somewhat clutter these charming perspectives which so many streets in Stratford open from the sort of central quadrangle before the Town Hall; and an early stroll before dinner showed them filling the river with their skiffs, and punts and canoes, and droning and whining out the tunes of their blatant gramophones. But people whose holidays are few do not know how to fit themselves becomingly into the general scene, or to take their joy without the vulgarity which it comes so easy for us betters of theirs to avoid. The great thing is for them to have their holiday, and it is no little thing for us finer folk to recognize the vast difference between ourselves and them. The town received them with the hospitality which was none the less sincere because it was commercial; but even for money it could not house them all, and it remains a wonder to me how the most of them got roofs over their heads for the night. Well toward midnight a policeman was seen going about with a party of Americans, richly able and eager to pay for lodgings, and knocking at every promising and unpromising door to demand shelter for them. I am sorry to leave that party of compatriots still walking the streets; they were probably only a little less undeserving than ourselves, who had thought to wire for rooms at *The Spotted Pard.*

But even then I did not think ourselves treated in the measure of our merit as the night wore away after we had gone to sleep in them. They were pretty rooms, very fresh of paper and paint, in an ell or extension; but with the falling damp outside a strong musty smell as of old

hay began to rise from the floor within. It was so strong that it roused the sleepers from their first sleep and kept them from their second till well toward morning. Then I was haunted in my dream by the noise of a ghostly thumping, such as horses and even cows make in the vigils which they seem able to keep, and not suffer the anguish of insomnia. Without waking or at all ceasing from my indignation at having been given rooms in what might once have been a hay-loft, I was aware that the noise I heard was no stamping of horses or cattle, but the muffled blows which Shakespeare was dealing on the doors of inns and lodgings with a demand for shelter, so that his valued and honored friend Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam and Viscount of St. Albans, should not be obliged to spend the night in the street.

CHAPTER III

"You see," Shakespeare explained, a few days later, "I had asked him down for the week-end, and I fancied he would be my guest at New Place."

"New Place?" I ventured to interrupt.

"Yes, of course; the little property I bought from my friend Underhill when I came to Stratford in 1597, a few years before I returned from London for good. It's at the corner of Chapel Street and Chapel Lane. You must have seen it—"

"Oh yes, yes!" I assented, from the strong purpose I had of seeing it.

"The house was in pretty bad shape when it came into my hands, not much better than a ruin, with two tumble-down old barns, and a weedy, wild-grown, old garden. But I had an architect look the house over and see what could be done with it, and he made something very pretty and comfortable out of it; those fellows have a lot of taste; and there's where I finally settled when I gave London up in 1609, and there's where I died seven years later."

It was rather creepy hearing him speak of his death in that casual way, but if he did not mind it I did not see why I should, and so I smiled, and nodded, and said, "I remember," and he went on.

"I had the garden dug out of the weeds, and the ground leveled, and sown to grass, and I planted a mulberry-tree—I was always planting mulberry-trees—"

"There I am with you!" I broke in. "I've planted no end of them. It's the most delicious fruit in the world!"

"Isn't it?" he joyously returned, though I could feel that he did not quite like having his autobiography interrupted.

"When I died I left it to my daughter Susanna, who married Doctor Hall— Or would you say Doc?"

"No, no; some Americans do, in the friendly domesticity of Western country towns; but in New York we don't say Doc—often."

"Hall was a good fellow, a gentleman born, and he had a large practice and was well-to-do; so that I expected the place would remain in the family, but it didn't fall out so. Susanna's daughter Elizabeth married a man of the name of Nash, and Susanna settled the place on them. It turned out that this couldn't stand in law, but they arranged that Elizabeth should keep the property when she became Lady Barnard in her second marriage. After her death it was sold to Sir John Walker, and he gave it to his daughter who married Sir Hugh Clopton, if you follow me. Oddly enough, it was Sir John Clopton who built the house I pulled down, and now he pulled *my* house down, and put up something very fine in its place."

"That's very interesting," I said, putting my hand over my mouth.

"Yes," Shakespeare said, absently; and then he sighed, and said, "Poor Anne!"

"Anne?" I echoed.

"Yes. My widow—my wife. She died in New Place a good many years after me. I have never felt quite happy about the way people talk of Anne. I suppose it began with my leaving her my second-best bed in my will, but that was because she always slept in it at New Place, and wanted it especially devised to her. I made no pro-

vision for her because she was in the affectionate keeping of her children, and it would have reflected upon them if I had done so. Young man!" he broke off from his pensive strain of reminiscence.

"Not unless you call seventy-six *young*," I suggested.

"I do," he answered. "I'm three hundred and fifty, counting both worlds, and I feel as young as ever I did. But what I was going to say was that I don't want you to carry away the notion that Anne was unworthy of me, or socially unequal. She was seven years older than I, when we were married; I was as ripe as she in experience, and I was a very forward boy; I don't brag of those days of mine. The world somehow likes to think meanly of the wives of what it calls geniuses; but if the wives had their say, they could say something on their own side that would stop that talk. Xantippe herself might give a few cold facts about Socrates that would make the world sit up; and if Anne told all she knew about me, my biographers would have plenty of the material that they think they're so lacking in now. She was a good girl, and her people were well-to-do. For the time and place their house was handsome, as you will see when you go to Shottery. Been to Shottery yet?"

"Not this time; but I'm going," I said.

"Do so. And when you're there think kindly and reverently of my poor Anne. I only wish I had been as good husband to her as she was wife to me."

His voice broke a little, and in the pause he let follow, I ventured: "I'm glad to hear you say all this. If I must be quite honest, the worst grudge I ever had against you was because of that second-best bed."

"Well, I'm glad to explain it, and I should be obliged if you would make the case known to your American friends. It was a rush bed like those you will see at Shottery, and such as my poor, dear Anne slept in when she

was a girl. She clung to it all her life; the children used to laugh at her about it. We had a good deal of joking in our family, at New Place. Anne liked the children laughing at her—especially Susanna."

I ought to ask the reader's patience with what happened just here. The moving-picture show is not yet established in the general respect which it must enjoy, and I hesitate to say that there now ensued as from a succession of rapidly operated films, like those thrown up at the movies, the apparitions of a young girl and a young man, she mature-looking at first, but growing younger and he older, till they fairly matched in contemporaneity. In the last they stood together, she with her hand through his arm, and he looking fondly down into her lifted face. Under this picture ran the legend:

So wear they level with each other's hearts

which seemed the adaptation of a familiar verse claiming a like effect in marriage from a disparity of ages.

Without saying anything my companion looked at these apparitions; when the last flashed out he glanced at me.

"Then it isn't true—I am glad it isn't true—as some people have fancied, that you didn't live happily with her?" I said.

"Man!" he cried, sternly, "Anne was with me seven years at New Place, after I came home to her at Stratford. She was with me when I died; and do you think—can you think—"

"No, no, I *don't* think it, and I'm ashamed of hinting at what I've heard others hint at thinking." He seemed unable to go forward from this painful point, and at last I made bold to prompt him: "But who was that Rev. Francis Gastrell who cut down your mulberry-tree when he bought New Place?"

"That churlish priest? Oh, I don't know. He seemed to have a spite against the whole place. He hated people coming so much to see the tree, and he pulled the house pretty well to pieces for no better reason. To be sure, the Cloptons had largely made it over by that time. You'll see some of the old foundations—I don't say the original. They've made a pleasant garden of it now, and planted it with trees and flowers. They've got a sort of typical mulberry on a rise of ground in the lawn; I believe it was a slip—you can't kill a mulberry—brought from my old home-place—they call it the Birthplace—which, of course, you've seen. You must go and sit in the New Place garden; it's very nice."

He lapsed into a dreamy silence, and seemed to have forgotten so entirely what we had begun talking about, that after waiting rather a long time without saying anything, I hemmed, and asked, "And Bacon?"

"And Bacon?" he echoed. "Oh, *yes!* About our adventure that first night? I'll own it had slipped my mind. But you know I brought him quite confidently here," and as Shakespeare said this, I perceived we were sitting in the New Place garden on a bench just opposite the typical mulberry-tree; I noted that the berries were pale red, and I remembered leaving my own mulberries black-ripe at home a month before. "And really, till I came quite to the corner here, I didn't see that the place was as bare as the Rev. Gastrell had made it; while we came along I had been looking at the moon over the tower of the lovely old Guild Chapel, there, which it silvered along the edges. You might have knocked me down with a feather; I'd been counting so on an eager welcome from Susanna and my poor, dear old Anne; and suddenly it went through me how dead and gone we all were, as well as our pleasant home. I made his lordship what excuse I could, and said I must ask him to put

up with humbler quarters in my Birthplace (as they call it) off in Henley Street. I could see he didn't like it; but he was very tired, and he said he should be content with any sort of shakedown; he added something inculpatory about his supposing I had not thought of Bank Holiday when I asked him here. I can scarcely expect you to believe me when I tell you what happened at the Birthplace; if it hadn't happened to me I don't think I should believe it myself. We found the premises in the keeping of a fellow who had been got in to assist the regular custodians, worn out by the rush of Bank Holiday; and he pretended not to know me at first, but I soon made him understand *that* wouldn't do; even then he demurred at my having brought a stranger; he said that none of the chambers had beds in them, now, and he could hardly make so bold as to offer us the settle where he had been napping on some rugs. But I said this would do very well for my friend, and I would make shift with any sort of large chair. I said my friend was Lord St. Albans, and he must get a night's rest, and the man said, 'Not Sir Francis Bacon?' and I said yes, and then he answered that he could not think of letting Bacon remain under my roof for a single hour, much less a whole night. He hinted that the fact of my bringing him with me there threw a doubt on my own identity; didn't I know that the authorship of my own plays had been impudently claimed for this man; and how could I be going about with him on these friendly terms, and trying to extort a reluctant hospitality for him from my native place? I told him that I would be answerable to Stratford for anything in the case that affected her honor or pleasure; that neither Bacon nor I cared the least for that silly superstition, and were, as we always had been, perfectly good friends. While we were wrangling Bacon drowsed in the chair he had sunk into and slept heavily; it was the

only sleep he got that night, poor ghost! Actually the man turned us out at last, threatening to call the watch if we didn't go! Of course we went, poor old Bacon stumbling along, heavy with sleep, on his sore feet; and I suppose we must have knocked at every other door in Stratford."

"Yes, I heard you," I said, and I wanted to tell him how I thought at first it was the stamping of hoofs under my room, but of course he could not interrupt himself for that.

"It was the same story everywhere: full-up! At some places they were kind and truly sorry; at others they were furious at being called to the door, and banged it in our faces. But we came at last to a house where they said they had a room with two beds in it; and I pushed in at once, before Bacon could object to a double-bedded room; I wasn't sure that he would have objected, but he's rather crotchety, you know. The man of the house was such a kindly soul, and took his having been knocked up at one o'clock in the morning so sweetly that I thought I would please him by letting him know what a distinguished guest he had, and I whispered that my friend—he was drowsing again—was the Viscount of St. Albans. He started back, and his face darkened; it turned fairly black with a frown. 'Do you mean Bacon—*the* Bacon?' 'Well, yes,' I said, 'Sir Francis you know; our late Lord Chancellor.' 'Then,' says he, 'I'll thank you both to walk straight out of my house. I would rather burn it down than let it shelter that cruel wretch for a single night—a single hour—a single minute! Go!' 'But my dear man,' I said, 'you surely won't. I'm your fellow-townsman, and I entreat you not to bring shame upon the place by this barbarity. I've lived here, man and boy, body and soul, for three hundred years, and I never knew the like. When I tell you who *I* am I think you'll be willing to let us stay. Why, I'm—'

"'I don't care *who* you are,' he roared. 'Out you go, and go you should if you were Shakespeare himself.'"

He laughed in an apparently lasting enjoyment of the joke, and then, noticing that I did not seem to share his amusement, he checked himself for such explanation as I might have to offer.

"Why, but—why, but," I began, "I don't quite understand how, being disembodied spirits as you were, you required lodgings at all. I should have thought that the 'viewless wind' would have been shelter enough—"

I stopped, and he said with a smile of interest in the psychical fact: "There is something rather curious in all that. We don't—we're not allowed to—return to your world without certain conditions. If we materialize, as you call it—the term is inexact—we must put on some of the penalties as well as privileges of mortality, of matter. We get hungry; we feel heat and cold; we want roofs and walls about us. You see?"

"Yes, I see," I said, but in fact I did not see, or at least see why. "Then I should think that after being liberated from those conditions you wouldn't care to resume them —often."

"We don't. And that accounts for it."

"Accounts?"

"For our coming back so seldom. The incalculable majority of us never even wish to come back. There isn't really much meaning in our return. Some of you here think it would be a good thing if we appeared as a testimony to our continued existence, but we don't like being doubted and denounced as impostors when we do that, as occasionally happens; and it's generally felt that you who are here now can wait, as we waited before you."

"Yes, there is sense in that," I said. "And what, if I may ask, has induced you to materialize at this time?"

"Well, I rather like being here in August, for what they call my festivals. I always had a tenderness for the place, you know."

"I don't wonder."

"And I like to realize that I'm remembered here. But they're painful, too—some of the experiences of coming back. We don't return without resuming the griefs, the sorrows of our mortal state. As long as we remain in eternity we are quit of our bereavements; if we come back to time our losses are as keen as in our mortal lives. I cannot revisit New Place without losing my dear boy, my Hamnet again, who died when he was eleven; I had so counted on his coming to live with me there, and I had my eyes on it all the more fondly because I thought to have him my heir to it."

His voice shook, and I said, lamely enough, "But it's all right now?"

"Oh yes, it's all right. As he never married, he continues with his mother and me; his sisters continue with their husbands."

"Why, I should think you would all continue together."

"No, husbands and wives continue together. Marriage is the only human relation that endures forever. It destroys the old home to create a new one, and this in turn is destroyed that a still newer one may be created."

"It seems a little hard," I mused.

"No, no! It's all *right*. It's reason; it's logic; it's love. How could it be otherwise, if you will think? We blood-kindred can all be together instantly, by merely willing it; but Anne and I *are* together, and we have our Hamnet with us always—our little one, our dear boy!"

CHAPTER IV

At the time Shakespeare repeated the speech of the householder who turned him, because of Bacon, from his door, I did not realize its full import. I had to live almost a whole August in Stratford before I could feel the force of it, or know just how much it meant, not to Shakespeare himself, for he always was and always will be a very modest man, but how much it meant to the man who uttered it. He had, in a manner, to take his life in his hand, and to launch himself in the tremendous risk of something like perdition, for it was little short of blasphemy to say such a thing in Stratford. The place may not have sufficiently prized her inestimable citizen in his earthly lifetime, but she has abundantly made up for any oversight of the kind since those days. She cherishes his memory with a sort of intensive recollection, which leaves no moment of his absence or his presence unremembered. I say absence and presence, but if forever absent he is forever present in these fond records; and one cannot witness them, though a wayfaring man, and err in a sense of their wonderful comprehensiveness.

It is not the names of streets or houses that speak of him; I do not know that there is any street named after him, and the sole objective monuments, architecturally and sculpturally, are so poor and few that one might wish there were none. A sprightlier fancy than Stratford's might have called every house after some person of his plays; and this had been done in the pleasant

hotel which received us when all the good will of *The Spotted Pard* could not avail against that ancient and barn-like smell which filled our pretty rooms and choked us from our dreams. The rooms in the pleasant hotel I mean are each named for some hero or heroine, mistress or lover, whom the poet left to outlive him here through the whole bounds of human fancy; so that if the lady in *Desdemona* had decided to stay on another day, the gentleman in *Sir Toby Belch* might have been going unexpectedly; or the party who had engaged *Troilus* and *Cressida* might have decided to take *Romeo* and *Juliet* instead. If *Prospero* had been assigned to some one vaguely wiring from London, the wirer could be put in *Macbeth* or *Othello* without knowing the difference, when he came, and the maiden ladies whom the manageress had meant to give the *Weird Sisters*, could just as well have *Hermia* and *Helena*, if the married pair personally applying did not like *Katherine* and *Petruchio*. Outside of the pleasant hotel, however, the memory of Shakespeare is wholly subjective, but it is none the less pervasive and exclusive for that. More and more one stands amazed at its absolute possession of the place. In that England of kings and nobles, of priests and prelates, of heroes and martyrs, there is no care for them in Stratford, though I suppose that they must all have more or less masqueraded there in their time.

That loyalty of the English, which we Americans can never understand, had indeed dug up for dramatic use in the Bank Holiday Pageant following our arrival, the fact of Queen Henrietta Maria's entry into Stratford before the coming of the hapless Charles; and not far away at Edgehill a great victory of the Commonwealth was won; but all such memories sink and fade before that which began to fill the world from this little town, till now the world itself can hardly hold it, and I do not doubt it will

be found common fame in Mars when Mars is proven inhabited beyond peradventure, and in Venus if ever she is seen giving her cold cheek to the kisses of the sun. In Stratford, I do not suppose there is any man, woman, or least articulate child who does not know something of Shakespeare, and I have no question that under their feet the passers from the remotest corners of the earth could hear the very stones prate of his whereabouts if they stopped to listen. That was not quite my experience, but I was not surprised, when I issued from the New Place garden with the poet, to hear a gray cat mew intelligent recognition on the sidewalk before the gate. By this time it was entirely natural that the night should be past, and the sun should be warming the English world which it seldom overheats, instead of the moon, which had seemed to be silvering the edges of the old Chapel tower while we talked.

Shakespeare stooped over and scratched the grateful forehead of the cat which pressed plaintively mewing against his ankle and lifted one paw to him as if for pity. "Why it's lame, poor little chap," he said. "I hope it's some honorable wound received in battle, and not a pinch from a passing motor-car. At first," he added, while he still kept acceptably scratching its head, "I thought it was one of our New Place cats; Susanna was very fond of cats; but then I saw it couldn't possibly be living now even with its nine mortal lives put end to end; they would be *mortal* lives of course."

He laughed softly with a kindly pity in his laugh, which won my heart more than anything he had yet said. I began to understand, and I understood more and more why his contemporaries called him gentle and sweet. He stooped again, and again scratched the head of the cat, which now rubbed harder against his ankle, and to my unspeakable astonishment and its own, passed through

the limb, and came out on the inner side of it. The creature looked up, and then parading round him with arched back and lifted tail, tried the other leg and came through it as with the first. At this result it looked up as before, and catching a mocking glance from the poet's eyes, it mewed loudly and limped off as swiftly as its three legs could carry it. He followed it with his laughter, but now boyishly wild and joyous, as at some successful trick. "Poor old Tom!" he called after it. "You didn't realize that I was shadow, did you? Well, when I come again you may be shadow, too, and then you can rub against my legs without rubbing through them!"

He laughed and laughed, with that soft, kindly laugh of his, which made me understand so many things in his philosophy that I had not understood, and which was so simple-hearted and sincere as well as wise, that it made me ashamed not to own that I had shared the cat's bewilderment. I said, "Oh yes, matter would pass through spirit, just as spirit would pass through matter." And then I pretended a recurrent interest in his overnight adventure with Bacon, and I said: "Apropos of life, mortal and immortal, I didn't exactly understand just where Lord St. Albans did pass the night, after all."

He smiled. "No, I didn't tell you. But I will, sometime. I think it will interest you. That's one of our privileges in the future life—as you call it—and it's a great privilege."

"And—and couldn't you tell me now? I should so greatly like to know. Where is he this morning, for instance?"

"Well, I don't know that I could just say."

"But—but," I persisted, for I felt that somehow he was slipping from me, and I could not bear to lose him yet, "you didn't mean to imply that this last man turned you out because of that Baconian hypothesis?"

I scarcely remember how I was going to get him to answer me; but before I could bring my purpose to bear, I was alone with the crippled cat which was mewing its pathetic entreaties to me, and the Bank Holiday sun was climbing the sky to shine unbrokenly on the Pageant slated for that Monday. Then I was sensible of there having been a Sunday between this Monday and the Saturday of our arrival, and of our having driven out through its afternoon heat and dust to see an aviator go up in his biplane from a clover-field, and buzz first loud and then low while he mounted into the "pits of air," as Emerson called them in a subtle forecast of the atmospheric pockets which the airmen have found in the welkin. We crossed the fine old bridge over the Avon, which we left to the aimless joyance of the holiday makers, marshaled by the trumps of gramophones braying from their punts above the prone shapes of young men stretched out, as the wont in England is, in the hollows of the boats, while girls paddled or poled the dull craft along. Beyond the river stretched the dusty road, with pairs wedded and unwedded, and families of fathers and mothers and children on foot or in perambulators, thickly trooping toward the clover-field, and patient of the carriages and motors that pushed through them as patient as themselves. They seemed not to know how hot it was, and they took their pleasure without expense when they reached the clover-field, where it was as easy to see the flying outside the hedges as inside them. None of them seemed to feel the Sabbatarian scruple which had forbidden the Race Track authorities to let the airmen fly on Sunday from the course where so much money must be gambled away on week-days. Every nation has its peculiar virtues, and the English, who are not without their vices, expect to have their Sabbath-keeping imputed to them for righteousness when they are playing the

horses. I who know nothing of horse-racing but as a spectacle, am not sure that man-flying is more beautiful, and it is now scarcely more novel. The machine harshly and then softly buzzed about the sky, and descended and ascended, and all who strained their necks to see it were equally content whether they had paid or not paid.

What left me with no sort of question was the Pageant next day, for whatever the Pageant is it is joy, void of all alloy of misgiving. Event for event, I think I liked best the pleasure of the actors, who were to help the sight so much, assembling for their floats behind the Theater, in those masquerade properties they had so easily come by. The ladies were preoccupied in woman's great business of looking beautiful, as if they took seriously the burlesque of the Elizabethan courtier who capered about painting their cheeks for them. A friendly old gentleman in the crowd, who made our acquaintance and kept it at every point throughout the morning, here tried to remember what part he had once taken in a Pageant long ago, and was not satisfied with his son's suggestion that it was Falstaff. When the procession was formed the floats toiled slowly and shakily through the well-contented town; floats of fairies great and little, historic floats and dramatic, and of the chiefest rustic and mechanic and domestic arts, all led by Queen Henrietta Maria making her prolonged and repeated entry into Stratford. A vast Swan built up of white cotton batting satisfied the heart jealous for the primacy of the Swan of Avon in a supreme hour of his native town, and if it came last in the show, it certainly did not come least. The fairies danced and sang their way through the streets, and the large children seemed as single-heartedly glad as the little, and when they happened to be young girls, as lovely. But I gave my heart most to the old chair-mender, who in his

linen smock frock and his aged top-hat repaired a chair-bottom throughout the morning with unflagging zeal.

The long forenoon ended with a longer afternoon in the meadows beyond Avon, where all the local sports had their turn on foot and on horseback, with old and young in the acts. A hundred little girls skipping with their skipping-ropes like one, and acrobatic boys in divers circus feats, represented the schools; fencing, single-stick, wrestling, running, and leaping by amateurs varied the generously contributed events of the cavalrymen, who, from some neighboring station, slashed each other's paper plumes as rival knights, and wrestled from their horses' backs. When the spectacle became unbearable without tea, there was of course a tea-tent where you might have it at the counter or at tables on the grass; if you ordered it at a table it was our experience that the tea-maiden who took the order had it, after a hesitation, on her conscience to warn you beforehand that it would be a shilling each, and not sixpence, as at the counter. I thought at home we might have been left to the greater outlay without the forewarning; but perhaps not.

CHAPTER V

THE Pageant which began the August festival at Stratford was only the beginning. It ended at noon; the other things went on the whole month; and I am not sure that the pageant had quite got its paint off before the song, the dance, the masque, the play, and the lecture were in full tide of joyance. They went on concurrently, like those streams which meet from different sources and swim together in one channel to the sea; and as you were borne with them you became yourself of their effect if not their origin. You became a part of the general transport, and felt, though you might not altogether look it, the happiness of the town in her greatest son, the greatest of the sons of men. As the days passed in a golden sequence scarcely dimmed by a few cloudy hours, it seemed as if there could never be such another August if ever there had been its like before, and the Genius of the festival, whoever he was, must have rejoiced more and more that he had appointed it for the season which Shakespeare might have chosen himself for his natal month rather than the raw April that chillily welcomed him into the world. Of course the right Shakespeare festivals are and have been held on and about his accepted birthday, but if the gradual rise of the August celebrations has been from a sense of his own imaginable preference, I should feel it a very graceful compliance. I should not think their coincidence with the greatest Bank Holiday of the year would be offensive to his memory; he would not prob-

ably have objected to sharing them with the middle, and lower middle, and unqualifiedly lower, classes who then flood the whole English land and who seem to wash through his native town in tides that rise yearly higher. If he seems in his plays to show little specific sympathy with the groundlings, that is no doubt because he was himself a groundling, or very near it, and knew, as they know, that as groundlings they were no better than their betters. But this is a point which he was to touch upon later, when I brought it home to him in one of those tacit colloquies we were often holding in Stratford.

As for his actual, or putative birthday, I have ventured a conjecture of the English April's chilliness in the sixteenth century because I have found April so cold in the twentieth, but, for all I can really say, that famous twenty-third of it may have been one of those rich, soft days, full of dull sunshine when the flowers make haste to open themselves to the bees, and the birds do their best to flatter the trees that they have made no mistake in budding or even blossoming. In fact, if, as many contend, we know very little about Shakespeare, we know least of all what sort of weather it was the day he was born. This is one of the strongest proofs of the Baconian authorship of his plays; for if Bacon had been born on that 23d of April, we should have known just how the thermometer stood, and whether the day was wet, or the spring early or late; he would have noted the facts himself. But I do not mean to fling this apple of discord among my readers; it was never gathered in Stratford; for no such fruit grows there. They have scarcely heard of Bacon in that devoted town, though indeed I found at one of the shops a small bronze door-knocker figuring the Lord Chancellor in the court where he took bribes if he did not actually sell justice; the point has been made in his favor. On the other hand, in a shop-window not

far off, the proprietor had sacrificed his very patronymic to the poet's fame in the sign of "Bacon's Shakespeare Restaurant." I was thinking, "How Shakespeare would enjoy seeing this!" when in one of those cinematographic apparitions which he was apt to make in my consciousness, flashing in and out of it as the figures do in the films changing at the moving-picture show, he joined me and consented to share my amusement in it. But I observed that more and more he refused to smile at the cost of a man who had not himself been very tender of his friends while he lived among them here.

As we turned from the window and he led on down the street, he said, kindly, "We must always remember that he is one of the greatest benefactors of the race, and that he suffered greatly."

"And, his atonement, as far as his plea of guilty went, was magnificent. It was one of those supreme things."

"Magnificent, supreme! Yes, but what a tragedy!"

"*You* could have written it; *he* couldn't."

"Well, perhaps *that* one he could."

The incident by no means followed close upon our meeting in New Place gardens, but he had offered no facts yet as to where or how he had disposed of a guest who made even the poet unwelcome in his mother-town. I ventured to fancy, however, that he might have taken for their common shelter one of those pleasant houses which their owners are willing to let furnished in Stratford, together with their servants and the general good will of the place, while they are themselves off on their holidays, at the seaside, or in Brittany or Switzerland. In our own vain search for quarters, we viewed several such houses, as alternatives of the lodgings which were always full-up; and I have finally decided that Shakespeare took a certain pretty cottage which was proposed to us with a garden sloping to the Avon and a punt belonging

to it lying at the foot of the lawn. I am rather sorry now that we did not take it ourselves, not only because it had a populous wasps' nest in the center of a flower bed, and a temporary gardener with a carbuncle on his neck and three more coming, but because I should like having lived in a cottage haunted by the greatest poet and the greatest philosopher of all time. We should not have known they were there by day, and by night we should have been so tired with each day's pleasuring, and so drowsy from being up every night at the theater for the Shakespeare plays, that we should not have objected to the ghostly presences that exchanged criticisms of each other's lives and works in our dreams.

It would not be easy to give a true notion of the fullness of each day's pleasuring without seeming to give a false one, and I shall not try to do more than touch here and there on a fact of it. I should not be able to say indeed just how or why we found our favored way, one of the first mornings, to the Parish Parlor where we somehow knew that there was to be folk-singing and folk-dancing, and a lecture about both. Two years earlier we had formed the taste for these joys at a whole day of them in the Memorial Theater, and had vowed ourselves never to miss a chance at them. The songs then were sung and the dances danced by young people and children from the neighboring factories and farms, but now the intending teachers of those gay sciences were being taught by one deeply learned in them and of an impassioned devotion to them. One of the ballads was so modern as to be in celebration of the *Shannon's* victory over the *Chesapeake* in the War of 1812, when the American ship went out from Boston to fight the British, and somehow got beaten. It had a derisive refrain of "Yankee Doodle Dandy O," and whether or not the lecturer divined our presence, and imagined our pain from this gibe,

it is certain that the next time he gave the ballad to be sung, he adventurously excused it on the ground that it possibly celebrated the only British victory of the war. Nothing could have been handsomer than that, and it was in the true Shakespearean spirit of Stratford where fourteen thousand Americans come every year to claim our half of Shakespeare's glory.

Three days of the week the lecturer taught the teachers by precept and example; he talked a little, very simply and unaffectedly, from full knowledge of his theme, and then he called upon the students to sing and dance. He was not above giving them the pitch from his pipe, and then playing the tune on the piano with the accompaniment of a girl violinist; and we could not choose whether we liked the singing or the dancing better. They sang old country ballads and they danced old country ballets, telling stories, and reverting to the primitive earth-worship in the lilting and the stamping and the bell-clashing of the morris dances. The pictures which the learners made in illustration of the lecturer's theme were our unfailing joy, but the first morning we had our soul's content absolute beyond any other fortune when the whole glad school issued from the place, and formed in the middle of the street, where, men and maids together, they took the light of the open day with the witchery of their art, as they wove its patterns with their intercircling shapes and their flying feet and their kerchiefs tossing in the air above their heads. This wild joyance was called a Processional, and it was likewise called Tideswell, after the village where it was first imagined. One morning the lecturer joined in it, and became a part of its warp and woof.

It was a vision of Merry England which the heart could give itself to more trustingly than to any dream of the olden time when, with whatever will, England had far

less reason to be merry than now. At last the sense of human brotherhood seems to have penetrated with conscience the legislature long so cold to the double duty law owes the common life. The English lawgiver has perceived that to keep people fairly good it must make them decently happy. Better wages, evener taxes, wholesomer housing, fitter clothing, are very well, but before these comes the right to a fairer part of the general cheer. It was told us that the young people who came to learn these glad tidings at Stratford were all teachers in the national schools, and that they were paid by the government for their pleasure in learning them. Perhaps I have not got it quite right, but it ought to be as I have got it, and at any rate I will leave it so. It is certain that these young men and maids were working as conscientiously at their gay sciences as if they were gloomy ones; the young men in tennis flannels and the maids in the gymnasium wear which left them free to foot it illustratively in the morris and the country dances. Most of the young ladies were housed for the month in a girls' school, with its dormitories and its lawns and groves; others dwelt in tents along the levels of the Avon, where through its willows you could see them from your punt making their afternoon tea, or kindling their fires for the evening meal, all sweetly sylvan, and taking the heart with joy in their workday so like a holiday. They went about the streets of the town in the waterproofs which cloaked the informality of their ballet dress; sometimes the dress was so little ballet that it needed no cloaking, and such a dress we once saw worn late in the afternoon when the wearer had to fly up the street toward the Parish Parlor so as not to be late for the song-and-dance lecture. The dress was blue, and it fluttered about the young ankles as the wearer ran along the wall under some overhanging bushes which claimed her part of their

bird-life and flower-life, and thrilled the heart of the beholders with a sense of beauty escaped from some

> Attic shape, fair attitude, with brede
> Of marble men and maidens overwrought.

Then one of those who saw the lovely vision thought, "What a pity Shakespeare could not see that!" and instantly to his inner hearing came the response, "I never miss seeing such things as that," and there at my shoulder the friendly phantom was, or was not, it mattered so little whether or no.

AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

CHAPTER VI

At Stratford I felt as I had not before that one of the most charming things in Shakespeare, a man so variously charming that his contemporaries each might love him for a different thing, was his fondness for his native town. Every one knows how affectionately he came back to Stratford from his brilliant success as player and playwright in London, and apparently could ask nothing better than to end his earthly days where he began them. During our wonderful August of uninterrupted golden weather he seemed to like dropping round to my hotel in the afternoon, when I had got my nap, and taking me a walk about the town, where he appeared to be as much at home with the modern aspects as with the older phases. He had the good citizen's pride in its growth, and noted how pleasantly it had pushed out beyond his birthplace to the northward uplands in streets of nice little, new-brick villas, each with its grassy dooryard and flowery garden. He liked all the newer streets, even those where the close-set, story-and-a-half rows of small brick cottages were like the monotonously ordered play-blocks of children. He professed a pleasure in their bright red, which he said expressed simple cheerfulness and cleanly comfort, and he could not understand at first how they should interest me so little, I being from a new world full of new dwellings. But when I explained that this was the very reason, he laughed and said it was quite imaginable, and he amiably consented to rambles through

the fields beyond, where Nature was neither new nor old, but was what she always had been and always would be. Or from the northward uplands he would turn back across the Avon canal, and come down William or Tyler Street to the gardens beyond the Birthplace and veer off through the irregular square at the head of Bridge Street, into Chapel. We never failed to join in tender enjoyment of the sentiment of the Police Station, with its lace-curtained bow-windows, and its beds of flowers beneath them. He seemed particularly fond also of that rather blank square where High Street began, with the slope of Bridge Street to the river and the little afternoon show of hucksters' booths at the top, and the huge omnibus motors for Leamington and Warwick standing midway of its incline before the Red Horse and the Golden Lion inns. He made me confess that the effect of the bridge across the river was very pleasant if not too picturesque, and now and then he walked me down to the holiday life of the stream, and the sheds of the cattle-market beyond.

I had not the ordinary traveler's zeal for the timbered houses so characteristic of Stratford, and so rather abundant in High Street and Chapel Street; but one day I fancied going with him into the Harvard House, which I confessed was very charming and perhaps the best example of the style. Apparently the American flag flying at the peak of the gable without the rivalry of the British colors anywhere in the town amused him, for he smiled in looking up at it, and said in his time we were all English, or if I liked, all Americans. I said he would probably find some Americans to prefer that formulation among the many thousand that visited his Birthplace every year; but as for me I should be content with saying that we were all Shakespeareans then. At this he laughed outright, and taking me by the shoulder pushed me toward the

door. He put his hand on the carved panel and we passed through its substance without attracting the notice of the kind woman who shows people about the place. There were a number of Americans following her and listening to her comment on the house which, girl and woman, she had known while it was still business offices, brutally modernized with plaster and paper that hid the rich, old black timbers and the wattle-and-dab of the homely walls. She was saying that she still lived in it, and kept house in the top story, while Shakespeare, who was making me invisible and inaudible with himself, laughed and said: "Before we took that cottage of ours on the river, I brought our friend Bacon here with me in the hope that this good soul, or perhaps even Mistress Harvard, might find us quarters after we had been turned from every other door in Stratford. You may imagine what a piece of luck I thought it when instead we were received by the Rev. John Harvard himself, who had come down to Stratford for the Bank Holiday, and had kept staying on with his mother for pure pleasure in the town. John is a good fellow, and I counted so confidently on his welcome that I made my friend known to him at once. 'You'll be glad to meet Lord St. Albans,' I said, 'because a law professor of yours over there in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was one of the most strenuous and zealous upholders of the theory that he wrote my plays. It's something that neither his lordship nor I believe in ourselves, but we respect the earnest convictions of others, and he has always rather liked having the theory dignified by a law professor's acceptance; he has a fellow-feeling for a jurist, you know.' I saw Harvard was a little bemazed by my palaver, and evidently groping for my friend's identity. 'St. Albans — St. Albans,' he said, and I said, 'Yes; Sir Francis Bacon, you know,' and then he said, 'Oh! Oh yes!' and shook hands, but not very

cordially, I thought, and he asked, 'What can I do for you, gentlemen?' which I always feel equivalent to 'How little can I do?' I told him he could save our souls alive by giving us the shelter of his roof for the night, and I related our misadventures. He laughed rather meagerly, and said he should be only too glad, but 'It's my *mother's* house, you know; I'm only here as a sort of guest myself. I'd ask her; but she's rather a stiff old Puritan, and I don't know just what she would say to having a stage-player under her roof.' 'Oh, that's all right!' I reassured him. 'I don't mind walking the night, myself, but his lordship is rather worn out, and I don't think he'll much mind my leaving him.' In fact, I saw by his anxious face that he wouldn't mind it at all; he was always ready to throw a friend over; Essex, you know. I added, to humor the joke, that though he *might* have written my plays, it was certainly I who played them, and Mistress Harvard's objection ought to rest on me alone. The Reverend John's eye glimmered cold; he hemmed and hawed, but said nothing about Bacon's staying the night under his mother's roof without me, and Bacon pulled himself up out of the chair he had dropped into, and we went out again under the stars, more hospitable than John Harvard's eyes."

I was rather blankly silent. Then I managed to ask: "And is this your notion of something amusing? Or merry, as you would call it?"

"Why, if it doesn't appear so to you! But at the time I thought that after my being turned out of one house on Bacon's account he was having his revenge in being turned out of another on my account."

"Oh, I see. That *was* rather merry," I said, but I hastened to leave the point. "By the way, this strikes me as being one of the nicest of your old timbered houses; it's a style of architecture that can't very well be com-

mended for beauty; but I suppose it has charm, and it's endearingly simple-hearted. I like their opening a bit of the wall here to show the wattle-and-dab construction, the interwoven wooden slats filled in with mortar; we're mostly wattle-and-dab ourselves, morally, if not physically; and the old house has its stateliness. Looking from the back toward the street this main room is of noble size and proportions, and that nicely carpentered frieze is delicate and very pretty. Who *were* the Harvards, *any*way?"

"Not Harvards, even, when this house was built. It was built by your John's grandfather and grandmother, and very probably his mother, who was their daughter Katherine, was married from it to John's father; he belonged in Southwark, where I had one of my theaters, and his father was a butcher. My own father was a butcher, you know, after he failed in the wool business, and I handled the meat myself."

"Yes, yes," I hastened to interrupt; he was running to autobiography too much. "I hope you didn't obtrude the horrid carnage on the public as your English butchers do nowadays. I suppose," I ventured, "that it was considered rather a drop from the butchering business when you took up play-acting."

"You mean by my townfolk here? Well, they didn't regard my London life with pride exactly, as you may have inferred from the Harvards' reluctance about me."

"And over there," I pursued, helpless against the curiosity I had, "over there—where you are now, I mean—do they look upon it quite as the good people of that day did?"

"The dramatic vocation? Why, we are rather useful occasionally. Eternity gets a bit long, now and then, and a vivid representation of some sort helps make it go again. And in the case of a reluctant conscience, a sluggish and unwilling memory as to deeds done in the body,

if we can dramatize the facts to the doer— Yes, we are rather useful, and nothing is respected so much as usefulness, there."

He stopped, and I took the word. "I see; and I suppose you were away in London at the time this house was built in 1596?"

"I was back and forth a good deal, for I always meant to retire to Stratford and I was buying real estate here—"

"And Tithes, and supposititious Gentility, so as to qualify you to set up a coat of arms?"

"I gave way to that folly, yes. It is a part of the English illusion. You are fortunate in having had your eyes opened in America, where you care nothing for such things."

"Well, well," I parleyed. "I don't know."

"Really?" he returned, ironically. He was silent, and when he spoke again he said, pathetically: "I remember the year this house was built chiefly because 1596 was the year my poor boy Hamnet died. It would have broken my heart if his mother hadn't given me hers to keep it whole. That was when we were first truly married. I thought I was parting with him forever, but Anne knew better; we've often talked it over together, she and I, and the girls. It was then that I fixed the time when I should come to Stratford. We were in the old Henley Street house still, but I had my eye on New Place."

As he spoke I found myself in the street with him, and began taking account of the many timbered houses which I had already noticed in the different streets. We had the Tudor House directly at hand (rather overdone, after the quiet Harvard House), and as I glanced along Chapel Street at the stretches of the same sort of buildings, I said: "Why, if you took them all out of Henley Street, and Wood and Ely and Sheep and Chapel Streets, and put them together they would reach nearly half a mile, but

with their white masonry and black timbers, don't you think they would look a little too striking? Rather too like half a mile of zebras?"

"Why, you might say zebras; but they are not all so too striking as this Tudor House, which you're mostly carrying in your mind, and which is not strictly Tudor, though it is decidedly timbered. And do you think that any middle-class or lower middle-class dwelling in any country was then so good, or was in such good taste? I believe I've read in one of your own books that we English never had known so much comfort before or since as in the period of these houses."

"Yes, yes; certainly. And if I said it I must have been right, and come to think of it, I *was* right as to the inside of these houses. It's the outside that rather troubles me when I imagine an indefinite stretch of it; then it turns into that half-mile of zebras. You don't mind my saying it?"

"Oh, not at all. I believe the great mosque at Cordova reminded you of a colored circus tent—"

"Why, you do keep round after me! I didn't suppose you followed us moderns so closely. I'm sure it's very gratifying. But I suppose you have a great deal of time on your hands?"

"We have a great deal of eternity; excess leisure is one of our little penalties; if we've wasted our time on earth we have a sense of too much eternity. Of course it isn't rubbed in, or not indefinitely, though naturally there are extreme cases when it *is* rather rubbed in, or seems to be. Then a spirit is glad to turn to almost anything for relief, and in that way all your popular literature, all your best-selling fiction, for instance, gets read among us. I can't say that it's read by our best public, but perhaps the public's as good as the fiction."

I gave an unwilling laugh. "I hope your acquaintance

with my travels was not punitive. I don't understand that you wasted a great deal of time when you had the time."

"I gave myself vacant spaces. But your Spanish travels were not one of my penalties."

"Oh, thank you!"

"I'm not saying, though, that I agreed with you about the mosque at Cordova. I don't agree with you altogether about the outside of Stratford. In my time when it was all timbered houses it was a very dignified old town; it's only in my eternity that it seems to have gone off, now when many of the buildings along High Street and Chapel here are said to be timbered fronts stuccoed or bricked over. But as it is—"

"As it is, it's charming! Isn't this perspective delightful?" We looked along the friendly street, which, whether it called itself High, or Chapel, or Church, was always the same kind street, to where we saw it closed by a comely brick mansion, ample, many-windowed, and offering a rest to the eyes from the timbered quaintness which I dared no longer blame.

"Yes," he said, "all our perspectives are fair." And by an art he had, a sort of control over place, he gave me the cinematographic range of several other avenues, up and down, and then reverted with me to Chapel Street, where we had been standing. "But I think this is best; and don't you like the courageous fancy expressed in that façade yonder which seems to have burst into blossom 'from roof-tree to foundation-stone'?"

"Yes, I do like that; and I like your cabmen pointing the house out with their whips to their American fares, and telling them the name of the famous woman who lives in the house and owns it."

"You Americans are under a peculiar debt to that lady. You know it was she who heard that the Harvard House

was for sale and told a rich Chicagoan of it, and bought it for him, and so for the American nation and the American university which he gave it to. It was a handsome thing all around, but not handsomer for the millionaire than for the novelist; except for her he might not have known of the house, and so might have missed his great chance. It was she who imagined finding the present sixteenth-century house inside of the commonplace nineteenth interior and exterior which it wore when she found it for sale, and afterward realized it as we see it now. By the way, your Americans—"

"Oh, why alienate us by a geographical term? We were all one blood when you lived here in Stratford, and we have never ceased to claim our part in you; why not claim your part in us?"

"What would your Baconians say?"

"Let them say what they like. You are always ours, and so is Stratford. I am proud of our nation, but our name seems to part us!"

"Well, suppose we say Yankees, then?"

"No, no! That's what our illiterate Indians called us in your time, and your literary Indians call us now."

"Well, well, call yourselves what you like. Here certainly we are fellow-subjects—"

"Oh no!" I made haste. "Fellow-citizens!"

My companion laughed. "You are difficult. I was going to say merely that here in Stratford we owe a great deal to your countrymen, whatever we call them, especially your countrywomen. You know that two of them have lately bought my son-in-law's old house, and put it through the same process of restoration, or rather revelation, as the Harvard House?"

"Oh yes, I know that." And by one of these mystical effects which my companion could operate in virtue of his character of disembodied spirit, we were instantly in

the charming grounds of Hall's Croft. "This is delightful," I said. "To think of a place and to be there in the same emotion—it transcends all our earthly dreams of rapid transit. Swedenborg mentions it, and I always thought it such a poetical idea, but I never imagined it practicable."

CHAPTER VII

"CROFT; croft," I soliloquized, looking about me on the acre or more that spread from its inner boundary to a continuous thicket and wall next the street, with tall trees overhanging them: a space of level greensward with brown walks through it and a blaze of geraniums here and there. In the midst stood a mulberry of Shakespearean lineage, which had dropped its half-ripened fruit on the grass and gravel, as seems the habit of the English mulberry, and under this we stayed for the moment together. "Croft, croft," I murmured, and I went on with the lines from Tennyson's *Two Voices:*

> "Through crofts and pastures wet with dew
> A living flash of light he flew.

Of course, I always knew what crofts were, but you have to see one—and such a one as this—before you can realize that when a croft isn't a small Westmoreland farm, it is far more delightfully a turfy Midland garden hedged from the world of such a tranquil town as Stratford, and inviting to easy-chairs and afternoon tea and friendly talk, day in and day out, through interminable summers."

"Yes," my companion said, "Stratford is rather full of crofts; two or three more along this street, and such a vast one as The Firs where the folk-singers and folk-dancers are sojourning, and that behind the house of the author who found the Harvard House for you, and others opening in lesser limit from many a simple dwelling with a street-front that keeps its croft a secret from the passer."

"How English!" I said. "If we had a croft at home we would pull down the wall and pull up the hedge, and pretend to welcome the world to it, and then stay indoors and glare at people who ventured to pass over it. I think of all our fake simplicities and informalities the worst is throwing down our domestic bounds, and pretending we have no barriers because we have no fences. Why, if you found yourself, invisible and impalpable as you are, in our fenceless suburbs you would feel as strictly kept on the outside as an unbidden guest at a dinner. Of course the notion was, when the fences were first disused, that everybody would enjoy the beauty that somebody owned; but I doubt if it ever happened; the sight of it merely mocked the outsider, and until we really own the beauty of nature in common, we had better not pretend that we do. For my part, I believe in crofts, and I'm going to have one as soon as I get home."

"They take time," my companion suggested. "I don't suppose my son-in-law lived to see this croft in anything like its present state. He was at it as long as I lived, and I lived nine years after he married our Susanna. We thought it rather a fine match; he was a physician, and had a large practice throughout Warwickshire, with a social standing far above that of the daughter of an actor-manager and a writer of plays. He was an author himself, and kept a record of his *Cures* in Latin; and among his grateful patients were 'Persons Noble, Rich, and Learned.' There were thousands of such cases, and you remember Dr. Furvivall in his life of me says that if he had cured me in 1616 instead of letting me die we should have had an interesting account of his success." Shakespeare chuckled his enjoyment of the humor. "But I wasn't destined to the celebrity his learned pen might have given me; I have had to put up with the name that I ignorantly blundered into making with my plays. John

was something of a prig, I'm afraid; and whenever Ben Jonson, with some of the London fellows, came down, they had it hot and heavy in learned disputes that my 'small Latin and less Greek' left me out of. But he was a good husband to Susanna, though she never would allow that he was more of a man than her father." He laughed again for pleasure in his daughter's loyalty, and said she was her mother all over in that. "Yes, John was a good fellow, and if he fancied coming off here and building himself a house where he could have scholarly quiet about him, I'm sure no one could object. For my part I was used to the rush of London, and I liked better being in the thick of things at New Place."

Considering how a half-dozen people reading the tablet in the iron fence, and a few others peering through it at the foundations of the demolished mansion, with the passing of a cab or a motor or two, formed the actual turmoil about New Place (except when people were coming from the theater), I was tempted to ask my companion if that was his notion of the thick of things, but I also wanted to put a question of more pressing interest. "And do you suppose you could get me a glimpse of this interior here?"

"You mean of the house?"

"Well, yes."

"Would you be going to write about it?"

"Well," I hesitated, "things that I see are liable to get written about, you know. It was the case with yourself, wasn't it?"

"I think I'll let you come some day without me," he said, gently, but firmly. "Sometimes people are sensitive—"

"But anything related to you, no matter how remotely, is of such interest to the public."

I was trying for some more convincing demur, when I

found myself in the street outside the croft, and walking toward the dear and beautiful old church where my friend's immortal part lies under that entreating and threatening tablet. The thought of it gave me rather a shiver. "Oh, oh!" I began. "Had you thought of going in?" With a concourse of Cook tourists in motor omnibuses and on foot preceding us, I pretended a preference for some quieter occasion, but Shakespeare regarded them sociably enough, though he said:

"No, only into the churchyard." And we walked under the avenue of sheltering trees to the church door. The place is so kindly and as it were so homelike that one night I came there in the company of another and we got half up the avenue, moon-dappled through the leaves overhead, before we realized that we were in a churchyard, pacing over outworn tombstones, and so thickly peopled everywhere with the dead of earliest and latest date that we could not have stepped aside without treading on a grave. We turned and fled, but now with my deathless companion, I turned and kept to the river-side, where we sat down on some memorial stone, and looked at the stream with its punts and skiffs and canoes, and the meadows beyond with cows and boys in them, and those evident English lovers strolling together beside the water. Pretty well everywhere in Stratford, if you will listen, you will catch the low, hoarse jawing and jowing of the rooks, and this now fell to us from the tree-tops which were stirred by the breeze drawing cool along the river. The trees were well-girthed elms, all leaning a little from the shore, as if they had been lured by the river when they were tender saplings, and had not been able to draw back. From the farther and nearer expanses came the soft clucking of oars in the rowlocks, with the sound of voices, and a stray note of laughter; from some remotest distance the wiry whine of a gramo-

phone reached us. Suddenly, without warning, the bells in the church tower burst from their silence, and expanded in the air overhead as with a canopy of clangorous and deafening uproar. "Oh, I can't stand this!" I cried, startled to my feet by the explosion.

"Yes?" my companion said. "I suppose I'm so used to it; but it *is* rather dreadful."

"In New York," I said, proudly, "we don't allow it; we class it with the detonations of the insane and unsafe Fourth, which are now forbidden." I did not say that bell-ringing was almost the only unnecessary noise which we forbade at other times.

But probably Shakespeare knew; he said: "Yes, I suppose it belongs, with the noise of drums and trumpets, and cymbals and pianofortes, to the boyhood of the race; and sometime the church-bells will be silenced along with the guns and cannon-crackers and steam-calliopes as an expression of feeling. Perhaps," he added, "they can be so tempered as to have the effect of bells at a distance, the *squillo lontano* that melts the heart of the mariner when he hears it in the dying day."

"Beautiful!" I breathed. "Do you read Dante much?"

"Well, you know I picked up some Italian from my friends in London, when," he laughed amiably, "I was supposed to be idling away my time in writing plays and playing them. Italian was very much the fashion at court."

"Yes, I know; and, of course, you were always picking up the beautiful wherever you found it. You must feel it a great comfort," I suggested, "having a cultivated contemporary with you, now you're settled in your river-side cottage."

"You mean his lordship? Well, I don't know. He's not always in spirits; he has his ups and downs; especially his downs."

"Really? He isn't still worrying over those old things?"

"Not all of them."

"Because I can assure you that since he's come up as the author of your plays a great people have quite ceased to think of him as a false friend and a venal judge."

"Oh yes; I understand that; but it isn't always a consolation to him. By the way, why don't you come and talk to him? You haven't looked in on us yet. Come!"

In a moment we found ourselves in a passing punt, invisibly and unpalpably seated at the stern behind the head of the white-flanneled youth who lay stretched in the bottom of the boat dreamily admiring the awkward grace of the girl who was paddling her way among the different river craft. Besides the skiffs and canoes and the other punts there were steam and naphtha launches plying back and forth; but she got through them all, thanks less to her skill than the build of the punt, which is framed on the lines of the puddle-duck so far as upsetting is concerned. When we came abreast of the cottage we lightly quitted our unconscious hosts who kept along the willowy shore, while we mounted to the level of the rose-walled lawn, where we found Bacon walking excitedly to and fro with a large volume open between his hands. He wore the dignified and handsome Elizabethan gentleman's dress, and I admired that he seemed to be smoking a long-stemmed pipe, as if he had been one of of the first Englishmen to form the tobacco habit. He blew fitful clouds from it as he walked, and he was so absorbed in his book that he did not look up at our approach. Yet he seemed to know of our being there, for he said: "Of all the follies alleged in proof of my authorship of your plays, there is none quite so maddening as the notion that *you* couldn't have written them because if you had there would be more facts about you. The contention is, and it's accepted even by most of your friendly biog-

raphers, that there is little or nothing known of your life. I maintain that there is far more known of your life than there is of most authors' lives."

"There's more known, in some particulars," Shakespeare answered, merrily, as his day would have phrased it, "than I would have allowed if I could have helped it."

"You mean about the poaching, and the deer-stealing and the cudgeling by Sir Thomas Lucy's people, and your lighting out to London to escape jail?" I suggested.

"I was a wild enough boy," Shakespeare began.

Bacon took the word from him: "But I can tell you, my friend," he said, lifting his eyes and bending them severely on me, "that those things are the inventions of vulgar romance. Will, here, probably played his wild pranks, as he would own, but the man who ended as he did never went far in that way."

"Well," I ventured, "I didn't invent them and nobody could like better to believe them lies. I wish his biographers wouldn't mention them even to refute them, but perhaps it's because of the paucity of biographical material—"

"Paucity of biographical material!" The ex-lord chancellor violently struck the open page of the book in his hand. "Let me tell you that there is comparatively a superabundance of material, as Andrew Lang shows in his excellent book on *Shakespeare, Bacon, and the Great Unknown.* Far more is known of his life than of the lives of most other famous poets." Shakespeare smiled at me with a shrug of helpless protest, as if he would say, "He will *do* it," and Bacon went on: "Take, for instance, the case of Virgil, which I have just happened to look at in the encyclopedia here."

"The India paper copy?" I asked, seeing how lightly he held it.

"No; it's an old edition; but I've imponderabled it for

my convenience just as Shakespeare makes you invisible when it suits him to have you pass with him unseen." He handed the massive volume to me; it almost floated on my hand; and he continued, in taking it back, "Here is the most famous poet of antiquity, after Homer—"

"Then you don't believe that Homer was a syndicate?" I put in.

"No more than I believe that I wrote Shakespeare. And what does our encyclopedist know of Virgil, who lived when Rome was at the zenith of her glory, and was one of the central figures defined by the fierce light that beat upon the throne of the great Augustus? Why, he knows that Virgil was born in the country on his father's farm near Mantua; that he was of the yeoman class, and glad of it, as he suggests by his praise of rustic life in his *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. His father, though 'probably' a plain man, discovered his son's talent and put him to school at Cremona, and, 'it may be inferred,' went with him there. At sixteen the boy assumed the *toga virilis*, and 'shortly after' went to Milan, where he kept at his studies till he went to Rome two years later. 'A powerful stimulus must have been given to his genius' when he found himself there in the dawn of the Augustan age, 'as may be inferred' from certain lines in the first Eclogue. He studied under a rhetorician who was 'probably' the teacher of the future emperor, and became personally devoted to the Epicurean philosophy under Siron; but, if we may believe his verse, preferred poetry. The *Eclogues* allude to his circumstances and feelings nine years later, but 'of what happened to him in the interval during which the first civil war took place and Julius Cæsar was assassinated, we have no indication from ancient history or his own writings'; but, 'we may conjecture' that he 'was cultivating the woodland muse' in his native region north of the Po. In his first poem there is full record, however,

of what he felt at being expelled from his ancestral farm, which was confiscated to provide land for the soldiers of the Triumvirs. Augustus officially reinstated him, but when Virgil offered to resume possession the soldier whom the place had been allotted to, chased the poet across the river, and Virgil thought it best to take his father with him to the villa of his old teacher Siron. Then he went to live at Rome, where he was welcomed in the highest literary circles, and his *Eclogues* were published in 37 B.C. He left Rome, however, and after longer or shorter sojourn near Naples and in Sicily, 'it seems not unlikely' that he made a voyage to Athens. He spent the years from 37 to 30 B.C. in writing the *Georgics*, which he read to Augustus; and he spent the rest of his life in polishing the *Æneid*, which he did not survive to give the finishing touches, though he read three books of the epic as it stood to the emperor and his family. In Athens he met Augustus, who persuaded him to go back to Italy with him, and on the way he was seized with sickness from the excessive heat, and died at Brindisi. He was buried at Naples, where his tomb was long regarded with religious veneration and visited as a temple. 'That veneration . . . was greater than what we find attaching to the actual memory of any ancient poet, though the mystery connected with the personality of Homer excited a greater curiosity.' This is all," Bacon ended, closing and dropping the volume, which instantly resumed its ponderability and fell to the ground with a heavy thud, "this is all the careful encyclopedist has to tell of the life of the most famous and beloved poet of antiquity, except the fact that he was so much dissatisfied with the *Æneid*, which he had to leave uncorrected, that he instructed his literary executors to suppress it, and it would have been lost to the world if Augustus had not interfered and commanded its preservation. In fact, Virgil's wish for the destruction

of his immortal epic may be compared to the indifference of our friend here to the fate of his dramas, which he left to the ignorance of the printer and the ravage of any editor who chose to collect and publish them."

"The things had served their turn in the theater which they were made for; in those days when we literally *made* our plays, and we scarcely supposed people would care to read them." As he said this, Shakespeare sat down on one of the garden seats, and watched with a scarcely conscious smile the antics of the much-carbuncled gardener who had been pouring hot water down the wasps' nest in his flower bed and was stiffly capering about with the kettle in his hand to avoid the pursuit of the exasperated insects. As he finally disappeared in the direction of the kitchen, Shakespeare burst into a shout of laughter inaudible except to us who were sharing his invisibility.

"May I ask," Bacon demanded, severely, "what is so very diverting in the suggestion I have made? We will not pursue it if you prefer not."

"Oh, it isn't that," Shakespeare choked out, "it's the ga-ga-gardener and the wa-wa-wasps!"

"I hadn't noticed," Bacon returned, with dry offence. "You must excuse my inadvertance," and he moved toward the house.

"Oh, come, come!" Shakespeare called to him. "Don't go! What you have been telling us is something I hadn't the least notion of. I beg your pardon. Do go on!"

"There is no more," Bacon hesitated, "at least about Virgil, but I had thought of making a parallel of your own case with his—"

"Well, if it won't tire our American cousin—or nephew—or brother—or uncle—or fellow-subject—or fellow-citizen, here?"

"Not at all. I shall be delighted. I think it's ex-

tremely interesting," I made haste to offer in placation of our friend, who was still loath to forego his offense.

"It's this recurrent, this almost essential light-mindedness of yours which spoils so much of your noblest tragedy! You let your motley come clowning in at the highest moments, and to get a laugh from the pit you turn your *Macbeth*, your *Hamlet*, your *Romeo and Juliet* into farce. If you had taken my advice, or would take it now—but you wouldn't, you won't!" Shakespeare waited patiently, and Bacon, after he had fretted his grudge away, resumed. "What struck me was the poverty of the known events in Virgil's life. Of these there are scarce a baker's dozen of the most elementary; the rest is supposition and inference. There is nothing to show the character or nature of the man in the events; nothing that might not have happened to any other poet. It was a good deal so with Ben Jonson himself, who was one of the most self-advertised poets of our time. We know that he was a quick-tempered, violent-natured, warm-hearted, censorious, generous, pedantic, humorous, wrong-headed, delightful old fellow—"

"He was, he was!" Shakespeare assented, with enjoyment. "And he is much the same still. Of course, he has learnt rather more self-control, but he's 'rare Ben' yet, and will be to all eternity, I hope."

"Yes," Bacon continued, "but what do we know of the intimate facts of his life, the facts that shape and nature a man, the personal facts? We know that he was a posthumous child, and that his mother, who married a second time, is supposed to have loved him in a passionate way of her own, insomuch that when he was sentenced to have his nose and ears slit for 'insulting the Scotch' in a play, she prepared a poison which she meant to drink with him before the sentence could be carried out. His stepfather is 'said' to have forced him to lay a few bricks after Ben

left school, to remind him of their trade of bricklayer; and Ben is 'supposed' to have lived unhappily with his wife, whom he mentions coldly, and parted from after five years, though he remembers her tenderly in the verses commemorating the two children they lost. It is certain that he was sent to Westminster school, but 'it is stated' only on 'unsatisfactory evidence' that he went afterward to Cambridge. He killed a fellow-actor in a duel and barely escaped hanging; in prison he was visited by a Roman Catholic priest and was converted to his faith, which twelve years later he renounced because of the Papist complicity with the Gunpowder Plot. He went soldiering in the Netherlands, and came back to the bricklaying of his youth; later he traveled governor to Sir Walter Raleigh's son in France. For the rest, he lived and wrote and drank in London; but the encyclopedist doubts whether in the last of his visits to Stratford he was the cause of our friend here overdrinking himself and taking the fever he died of. These are all the intimate facts which his biographer can lay his hands on, and a fair half of them he doubts, or supposes. Merely in number—not to speak of significance—they do not compare with the well-known and generally accepted facts of the life of our friend here, who is imagined to have left little or no material for the biographer—"

"I wish," Shakespeare said, starting restively to his feet, "that my biographers would agree to forget *some* of the most intimate facts of *my* life. *I* have willingly done so, and I remember them only when I find them recurring in print. Then I feel like denying them."

CHAPTER VIII

THE philosopher glared at the poet from under brows which met in a frown such as he used perhaps to bend upon suitors in court while his pockets bulged with their offerings to justice. His pipe had now gone out, and he went about lighting it with the effect of having quite finished what he had to say.

"Well!" the poet prompted.

"There is nothing more," the philosopher answered, in cold resentment, and began pulling at his pipe.

"But that parallel?"

"I thought you preferred your trifling."

"My joke is dear to me, but not so precious as your interest in my biography."

"And I, if I may venture to entreat your lordship," I put in, "should think myself greatly the loser if I failed of your parallel. I don't think anything like it has been offered, yet, in proof of our friend's authorship of his plays."

His lordship continued silent for a little longer; then he severely resumed. "I had thought of enforcing the parallel with other examples, but it is not necessary, and I will only suggest in refutation of the argument that Shakespeare could not have written Shakespeare because he has left no handwriting of his behind except two or three autographs differently spelled from each other, that we have no signature of Chaucer's, though he was an eminent diplomat and went upon many embassies to the con-

tinent, requiring signatures. It is not certainly known who his father was, or precisely his wife. None of his poems survive in his own manuscript, and it isn't known which were irrefutably his; just as some of our friend's plays here are of doubted origin, and none were printed from his own handwriting. Your two poets are alike, moreover, in certain alleged violations of the law: Shakespeare is said to have stolen deer, and Chaucer to have taken part in the abduction of a young girl; probably neither did either; but the interesting fact is that uncertainties cloud the history of the courtier as well as the life of the player. Seven years of Chaucer's time left no record, just as nine of Shakespeare's left none. But when you come to speak of the paucity of biographical material in the case of our friend here, I would have you contrast its abundance with the want of facts concerning most of his eminent contemporaries and predecessors. It is perfectly known who his father and mother were and their origin. The year and almost the day of his birth are known, but not so clearly the place; though it was certainly Stratford and certainly not the Birthplace. The day of his baptism is ascertained, and when and where he went to school—almost. There is no doubt whom he married, and if not where, then when, and reasonably why. At fixed dates his three children are baptized. In a certain year and month he goes to London, where he becomes not so much personally a holder of gentlemen's horses at the theater, as a sort of horseholding syndicate or Trust, and an employer of skilled labor in the boys trained by himself for the purpose. From this business eminence he sinks to be a poet, a playwright, and even a player by distinctly dated gradations, and is enviously attacked for his success in the drama by a brother dramatist. The dates of his successive plays are fairly approximated in their production at the theater and their reproduction

from the press, and the time of his buying New Place is fixed. His unbroken relation to Stratford during his London years can be traced by the dates of his various purchases and lawsuits and participation in local affairs. His devotion to his family expressed itself in all filial, paternal and fraternal sorts; he marries his daughters to his liking; he stands godfather to his friends' children; when his mother dies he yields to the homesickness always in his heart, and comes back to end his days in Stratford. He wishes to be a principal citizen and a man of social standing; he buys tithes and joins in fencing the people's commons; he rejoices in a coat-of-arms, and likes to be known as William Shakespeare, Esquire, trusting that his low-class career as actor-manager in London will not be remembered against him. But he likes to be remembered by his old dramatic friends, and he welcomes Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson to New Place, where he lives till his death in peace, if not affection, with his wife. He even engages to excess in their jolly riot, for, as a Vicar of Stratford recalls some fifty years later, 'Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Drayton had a merie meeting, and itt seems drank too hard, and Shakespeare died of a fevour there contracted.' Others, however, hold that his fever was a filth disease contracted from the pigsties that then ran the length of New Place in Chapel Lane. But it is enough," his lordship ended, with a dignified gesture of his pipe-stem, "that he died full of glory and honor."

Shakespeare, who had been listening more and more restively, wincing from time to time at facts which I thought his guest might better have spared him, rose and stretched himself, saying: "I didn't realize before that I was such an unquestionable celebrity." Then, as I rose too and thanked his lordship for his convincing statement, but said I must really be going, Shakespeare, as if he would escape some merited reproach, said he would go

a little way with me, if I didn't mind, and we hurried off together. We had not got as far as the bridge when he answered the tacit question in my mind, as the custom is among disembodied spirits.

"Yes, he is often very tiresome company, especially when he gets to harping on my record and its sufficiency for all the practical purposes of the biographer. But I haven't the heart to stop him, for I know it forms his escape from grievous thoughts about himself which otherwise he could not bear."

"You mean his conviction of bribery, and his dishonor before the world; that heavy fine, which was the least of his burdens, and his deposition from the high office which he had held with such pride and splendor?"

"No, no; not chiefly that. He settled with that when he owned it, saying, 'I do plainly and ingenuously confess that I am guilty of corruption, and do renounce all defense.'"

"But why not supremely that immeasurable fall?" I insisted. "Above all other great men—for he was one of the very greatest—he 'loved the world and the world's law' of luxury and state and flattery. He crawled and truckled to those who could forward him, and he took their snubs and insults almost with thanks, as for so much condescension. He knew himself the sublimest intellect in the realm; why should he show himself the basest lickspittle in it to that old harridan Elizabeth and that slobbering pedant James, and his own ungracious kinsmen, their ministers?"

"Ah, it's a strange anomaly," my companion answered. "He is a riddle that I don't often attempt to read. But what I say is that he has long ago ceased to feel shame for his dishonor, but when he returns to earth the ingratitude and treachery he used toward those who trusted him are again an unquenched fire in his memory. He still writhes

in pity of the poor man Aubrey, whose bribe he took and then pronounced 'a killing decree' against him. And his friend Essex, who enriched him with gifts and never tired of showing him good will and doing him good deeds, and whom he repaid by hunting him to his death and stopping every chance of mercy which the law might have left him—in the remembrance of Essex he suffers as if Essex would be living yet but for his pitiless pursuit. I don't know how he bears it; and since he finds some little respite from his remembrance of the wrong he did by righting the little wrong which he thinks has been done me, I can't deny it him."

"No, of course not," I agreed, "but I could have wished that his argument had been a little less in the nature of special pleading."

"You mean in regard to that famous old saying of Hallam's that 'no letter of Shakespeare's writing, no record of his conversation has been preserved?' Why, I thought he met that fairly. People used not to keep their correspondents' letters, and I was never a great correspondent. But the encyclopedist, whom he mainly followed in his argument, cites as to my conversation the interview my kinsman Thomas Greene had with me in London concerning the inclosure of the common lands, at Stratford and Welcombe; and there were other meetings with the friends of the scheme, when I told them distinctly that I 'was not able to favor the inclosing of Welcombe.' This is not only proof that I could and did talk with people and that they remembered it; but it ought to be remembered by those who imagine I cared nothing for the poor, that in these meetings I defended their interests and not mine, in opposing the fencing of the common lands."

There was more warmth of feeling in Shakespeare's voice than he usually allowed to be felt in it; for the most

part it was expressive of a kindly, if ironical humor, as though the matter in hand were not worth very serious consideration, though he liked playing with it. I was about to say that I was glad to have him express himself so decidedly, in this connection, when I was aware of being alone, and I pursued my way across the bridge and kept on in one of those rambles through the town which were mostly as aimless as they were eventless.

CHAPTER IX

It was more than a week after we were placed in our pleasant hotel in Stratford before we began to look about us in the lovely country round. The town was enough, with its openness, its brightness, its smiling kindness; for the time we could not wish for anything more, and we never found anything better, though we found abundant beauty in the farms and villages of the Midland slopes and levels. Everything in Stratford was homelike, and nothing more so than the Cochin-China Tea Rooms, where we took our luncheon, with their blaze of a small flower garden behind and the little arbor at the kitchen door where you might have a table if you liked. The coffee was very good there, for a wonder in England, and the buttered brown-bread toast was an example to the scorched and refrigerated slices of cottage-loaf prevailing elsewhere on the island; and after ordering these it was pleasant to keep along Church Street past the low-roofed and timbered almshouses to the shop where first green gages and, after their season was past, large red Victoria plums were to be had. Such a crooked little shop, with half its stock in two unrelated windows, and the rest in baskets behind and under the counter that began elbowing you our of doors as soon as you got in, and ceased treading on breathless small boys with pennies in their hands, could have been rightly served only by two such scrupulous sisters, or at the worst sisters-in-law, who would not defraud us of a single plum in the half-pound. The fruit

was grown, they said, in their own orchards just out of town, but which way we never understood, and it was in no wise related to the fruit of their next-door neighbor, as he, equally with themselves, assured us. We always hurried back to the Cochin-China with it lest the toast or the coffee should be cold; but it never was, for at noonday the little tables were all full, and the service, though reliable and smiling, was not eager. We had a table in the back room looking out on the kitchen arbor, and though we were but three we kept it against all comers till one overcrowded day a young German priest came in with three nuns, and looked so hopelessly at a three-chair table that we could not do less than offer him ours, which was for four chairs. They took it with such bows and thanks as ought to have made us ashamed, but only made us proud of our simple civility, and anxious to found a claim to acquaintance on it. We did not push, though I tried hard to believe that it was my duty to tell them I knew a little of the German they were speaking, and I only eavesdropped as hard as I could till a decent chance of warning them offered. I suppose that there are sometimes gayer parties of young people, but I have seldom heard more joyous and innocent laughter than that of those gentle sisters in their angelic flirtation with that handsome young priest. He could speak English, it seemed, from his constantly saying, "All right, all right," and presently it seemed that the sisters could. All three of them were lovely and two were beautiful, and all three again were as glad as children; and none of the fashionable ladies we had left in London seemed so perfectly ladies as these dear sisters in their starched white coifs under their black veils and in their broadcloth robes falling round them in sculpturesque folds. When some offered courtesy broke what ice was left between us, the young priest was proud to tell us that the sisters were from a Catholic college in

England, and he went further and said that the least young of the three was "a very learned sister." This brought us somehow to the question, always rife at Stratford, of the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's plays, and the sister was of such a decided mind upon it that she was not surprised so much as grieved to learn that the poor lady who first mooted it had died in a lunatic asylum.

I could have wished that Shakespeare, and even Bacon, had been there to enjoy the learned sister's rejection of the theory, but I saw neither of them for some time after that day at their riverside villa. In the mean time we saw a great many fellow-Americans, not indeed at the Cochin-China Tea Rooms, where they came very sparingly, but at our hotel, where they abounded, mostly in motors with the dust of hurried travel upon them. I suppose that the motor-face, of whatever nationality, is not engaging; but when its composite expression was added to the effect of something intense and almost fierce that seems to characterize our native physiognomy abroad, one could wish that it was not always so self-evidently American in those who wore it. If the automobile conditions are everywhere such as to rob the motorist's presence of charm, to these compatriots' hardness of face was added that peculiar stoniness of voice which is so often noticeable in us, and which made them as wounding to the ear as to the eye. They overwhelmingly outnumbered the English, who lurked apart in the hotel parlor while the Americans prevailed in the hallway. It must have been difficult for the English to bear this, and I heard two of them revenging themselves one day: "It seems to me I have heard that voice before." "Yes; that's one of the educated ones." This voice was the cat-bird twang of so many of our women, and it sometimes made itself heard in the dining-room, where the dress of the speaker was not always of that superior taste which we used to pride our-

selves upon in our women. It was difficult to choose one day between the plumage of a lady who wore a single tall ostrich feather, full and blue, curling far aloof from her hat, and the feather of another lady exactly the same in outline, but as to the final curl black and skeletonized. There was in most of these motoring women an effect of not being sure that they had got all they had come for, or of not quite knowing what they had come for, and in their men a savage, suspensive air, as if, having given Europe a fair trial, as a relief from business, or as a pleasure to their wives and daughters, they were going to see about it when they got home. Perhaps all this is unfair; and perhaps it would not be just to judge our national nature from the expression of the average automobile people at home.

They had been motoring through England and Wales, as they would report when they got back, and were suffering a mental and moral dyspepsia from bolting the beautiful scenery untasted as they could seize it with distorted eyes, much as people seize the events of a three-ring circus. We ourselves became of their class for several runs into the country about, but besides not being able to afford the folly, we really preferred the neat victorias which they have cheap at Stratford, but not so cheap as good. In one of these, apt for our little party of three, we could find ourselves domesticated in the landscape round about. The country was of the same bright openness as the town, and one could as easily love it. I had supposed it leveler than it proved, though it was level enough, and where it waved, it waved with harvests of wheat and rye, golden and glossy green, rippling as the surfaces of the long ground swells at sea do. In the distance, the uplands were of a tender blue, and in the dim air the trees mounted like smoke from the hedges. The Avon and other vague streams idled about, and there were

bridges and farm-houses and villages that one passed without much worrying over their identity, though no doubt they each had an identity. They had their bowering orchards of gnarled apples and of wonderful plums, green and blue and red, which were as much an example to American plums as the wheat-fields to our wheat-fields. We praised one of the thickest harvests to a conversible farmwife, but she said, "Oh no, that was not good wheat; you could see between the stems." The region is not only a good farming country, however, but a good hunting country, and after the pleasures of the Shakespeare month end in Stratford the savage joys of the chase begin for the boyish men and women who ride to hounds through the sweet, insulted scene.

In England many things change, suddenly, thoroughly, but other things remain unchanged, usages projected from the dead past like the light from planets extinct long before it has reached the earth. They still have kings and queens in that romantic island, and lords and ladies who have no more relation to its real life than gnomes and fairies, but must be indulged with the shows and games invented for them in the days when people believed in them, and not merely made-believe. Now and then a grim smile of derision which is also self-derision breaks over the good-natured visage of the make-believers and is accepted by the universal tolerance as of right and reason. Hard by a fine old stone bridge, where the Avon found us in the country half an hour after we had parted from it in town, stood a pleasant inn, with lawns and potential tea-gardens round it, which called itself *The Four Alls*, and illustrated its name by a sign-board bearing the effigy of the king who Rules All, of a clergyman who Prays All, of a soldier who Fights All, and of an average man who Pays All. These Four Alls appear to prevail in every civilized country, but they might

not everywhere be painted in such smiling irony as here.

I believe it was on our way home from visiting the home of Shakespeare's mother at Wilmecote, that we stopped to converse with the amiable landlord of the Four Alls Inn. She was that Mary Arden who was as gently as his father was fiercely named, and whom one is willing to think as gently natured as her name. The Welsh are beginning to boast her of their race, as if, not content with the honor of the greatest living Briton, they must needs claim through her the greatest Briton dead; but if Welsh, she was doubtless of one of the many princely Welsh lines, of no apparent grandeur in its exile. The Arden cottage, at any rate, is a little wayside thing, belted in with a bright-flowered narrow garden, and it leans its timbered wall somewhat wearily, as from its weight of four hundred years, toward the earth. All the world knows, which knows so much too little of her world-famous son, that Mary Arden brought her husband this cottage and its sixty acres, under her father's will, with other lands and tenements inherited from her two sisters; and if not of princely state, she was of a comfortable yeoman lineage. When she went to live at Stratford it is pleasant to believe that she left her father and mother living at Wilmecote, and keeping up the ancestral farm there in better state than one sees it now. The cottage and the decrepit barns and stables, with their sagging walls and slanting roofs, inclose a sufficient farmyard, with a gate giving into a venerable orchard, which tempted but did not prevail with us to penetrate its grass-grown aisles. One likes to leave such places to their solitude; and besides, the tenant of the cottage, who promptly demanded sixpence each for letting us see it, was not sure that her summer lease included a sight of the orchard. She led us up and down over the homelike cottage, which

opened in an unexpected number of comfortable little rooms; these, opening casually from one to another, had been modernized, but not too modernized, with sparing English grates, where once the freer fires must have been of wood. Several staircases led to the upper rooms; the thick walls showed their oaken beams; the narrow sash were leaded; the floors were stone. It was very homelike, very suitable for a grandfather and grandmother, and I was thinking that if Shakespeare used to come out from Stratford to see the old people there he must have had glorious times, when the inaudible voice at my ear from the invisible presence at my shoulder, which I had now come to expect at any thought of it, said: "Yes, far more glorious times than any I ever had in London at the height of what I thought my prosperity. My mother used to bring me here when I was too little to know how homesick she was for it, and then sometimes my father brought me, and by and by I came alone. I dogged my grandfather's heels all over the farm till I came to know every inch of it, but I seem never to have lost any moment of my grandmother's cooking. When I went away I was in paunch and pocket full of the gingerbread which she made better than any one else in the world; I missed none of the wild berries in their season or the earlier and later apples in the orchard, or the plums that overhung the house-wall. I knew the dogs and horses and cows; I was not too proud to be friends with the pigs. I robbed the wild birds' nests, and I didn't neglect the partridges and pheasants even when I came to understand that they were sacred to the gentry; it was the beginning of my poaching, I dare say. I swam in a famous pool which there was beyond the orchard in summer, and in winter I risked a ducking on its thin ice. I loved Stratford, and my mother, and even my father, but a boy is king in his grandmother's house, and I bore

sovereign rule here. Yes, those were glorious times indeed."

As we drove home to Stratford, the afternoon grew lovelier and lovelier, with a mild sun and a few large white clouds lounging in a high, blue sky. In the hedges the hips of the sweetbriers were reddening and the hawthorn berries were already scarlet. The blackberries were ripe where the canes were broken down by the pickers. The wheat was mostly cut, and in the farmyards where it had been threshed the ricks of bright new straw were neatly thatched. We came from Wilmecote to the Alcester road by a lane that was almost wild, and out through a deep, peaceful valley; when we reached the highway two little girls in pinafores were standing beside it, one with her pretty arm up to shield her eyes from the westering sun; and in all our course we met only two motors, and—

"Yes, yes! It is peaceful, peaceful, utterly charming!" I said to the presence which had mounted with us for the homeward drive, of course not incommoding us in the least; but suddenly it had become an absence, in the fashion of such presences as soon as you take your mind off them; they are so delicately fearful of seeming intrusive.

AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

CHAPTER X

NEARLY every evening of every week of August we strolled out after dinner from our hotel to the corner of New Place, where Shakespeare died, down Chapel Lane to the theater where he still lived in those plays of his which were given every second night and every third afternoon. They were the most vital experiences of the commemorative month, and the Memorial Theater found in their succession a devotion to its office beyond the explicit intention of its giver. That is what I say now, trying to do justice to the esthetic and civic fact, but to be honest nothing of the kind was in my mind at the time. I only thought how charming it was to be going to a Shakespeare play on terms so quite unlike going to any other play in any other place. The days were shortening in August, but the twilights were still long, and they were scarcely half-way spent when they saw us to the theater with all the Stratford world, gentle and simple. The way across the street at the foot of the lane was guarded by a single policeman who sufficed to save us from the four or five motors glaring with their premature lamps, and panting after their run from Warwick or Leamington. Without his help one could have safely passed between the family carriages bringing the nearer neighbors to rites which the whole region frequented rather more than if they were of religious claim. But by far the greatest number of us came on foot, and when the play was done, we went home by the same means under the moonlight, in the informality of morning dress unless we had bought places in the first row of the balcony. The

orchestra implied no such claim, but partook of the informality of the pit behind it, which there as in most English theaters continues the tradition now lost to our theaters. The seats were not reserved there, nor in the upper galleries, which, however sparse the attendance elsewhere might be, were always packed by the undying love of the people for the universal poet.

Sometimes when I fancied the poet there, in escape from a heavy evening with Bacon in their riverside cottage, I liked to suppose a generous regret in him for not having anticipatively requited this affection by tenderer treatment of the lower classes in his plays. But then I reflected that the English lower classes have always preferred to have the smooth things given to the upper classes, especially on the stage, and that they probably found their account there in imagining themselves such or such a lord or lady in the scene, and fitting their friends and neighbors to the humbler parts. Once I reminded him of Tolstoy's censure of his want of kindness toward them, and he said he had been too nearly of them, in his own life; he satirized his own faults in them; and what literature was to do was to join political economy in making men so equal in fortune that there could be no deformity, no vulgarity in them which sprang from the pressure of need or the struggle of hiding or escaping its effects. The vanity of poverty was as ridiculous as the vanity of riches, and might be as fairly laughed at. His defense did not quite satisfy me, and I said I would hand him over to Mr. Shaw. But at the Memorial Theater I could not imagine any dramatist but himself, or hardly any moralist. In the wonderfully even performance of the plays throughout, the art of the actors did not slight the nature of the characters studied from low life; it was rendered with a reality that convinced of the dramatist's truth, if that ever needed argument. No part was slight-

ed, whether high or low, but one could have more pleasure of the upper classes because their reality was less tedious than that of the churls and clowns who, if anything, superabound in the Shakespeare plays; he might contend that they superabound in life. This evenness was, of course, the effect of unsparing vigilance in the admirable over-artist whose conscience was felt in every moment and every detail. His whole professional career had been directed to the Shakespeare drama which he imagined giving with an unselfishness unknown save among its most impassioned devotees. The range of the plays was suggestive if not fully illustrative of the poet's largest range. There were "The Merchant of Venice," "As You Like It," "Hamlet," "Much Ado About Nothing," "Twelfth Night," "Richard the Second," "The Taming of the Shrew," "King John," "Romeo and Juliet," and "The Merry Wives of Windsor"; and of these I saw such I had seen seldomest, but now I am sorry I did not see them all. They were all well done, and in censure you could say no worse than that some were done better than others. If I do not name the over-artist it is because I am naming nobody in a record which is keeping itself in a high fantastic air, and as much aloof from every-day matter-of-fact as if it were one of those romantic fictions I have always endeavored to bring into contempt. He took such peculiarly difficult parts as Richard the Second, or King John, with an address that made them live so in the imagination as to win your pity where your sympathy was impossible; he was specially trained, if not natured, for tragedy, but he could for instance abandon himself unselfishly to the comedy of such a part as Doctor Caius in "The Merry Wives of Windsor." His reward was to make it wildly delightful, and delightful a play which I had always imagined a heavy piece of voluntary drolling, but must

always think of hereafter as charming, full of the human nature of its day and of all time. I should have liked to make my apologies to Shakespeare if I had found him in the audience as often as I found him on the stage. I should have had to confess that mostly I found his comedies, in the reading, poor stuff, as compared with his tragedies and histories. But he usually came with Bacon, whom I should have to join in blaming those lighter plays. When it was a question of the authorship Bacon was stanchly Shakespearean, but that once granted he was somewhat less Shakespearean than such an ardent fellow-townsman of the poet as I had now become, could desire. There was a supreme moment of King John when I most longed for the author to enjoy it with me. The playing was of that beautiful evenness which left no part, and no part of any part unstudied, and which makes us rather sorry, in its steady glow, for the meteoric splendors of our American acting. After all, Shakespeare was an Englishman, and I suppose he spoke with an English voice in his plays, so that if I were an Englishman, too, I might be emboldened to claim that until you had heard the voices of the English actors in the several parts you had not heard his characters speak as Shakespeare heard them. To be sure, Shakespeare himself spoke with a Warwickshire accent, and though he had probably worn it off in his long London sojourn he must have returned to it after he came back to Stratford, as Bacon had noted in our first night with them in Cheltenham. Still, I should say that broad Warwickshire was truer to the accents which his inner ear perceived than those of our Middle West, or Philadelphia, or Broadway, or even Boston accent, or of them all synthetized in the strange blend which passes on our stage for the English voice.

In that supreme moment scene, costume, action, expression, were all so proper, so exquisitely harmonized

that though it was by no means the most important scene, or one of the most important scenes, I thought that if the poet could have witnessed it his heart must have swelled almost to bursting for joy in the perfection of it. I tried to compel his presence by that longing which I had several times found effective with him, but he would not respond, and I was thrown back upon the question how much or little a great dramatist of the past might really care for the modern perfection of the upholstering which so stays and comforts the imagination of the average theater-goer, say the tired business man or the over-intellectualized club woman. Shakespeare, if he had come at my call, might have said that the action and expression were richly enough for him, and these were what so chiefly satisfied him in the highest moments; that the costuming and the setting were for others and not for him; that for him these were like the dress of a gentleman which if fit was the last thing you noticed in his presence. Then I might have come back at him with the argument that if he had been imagining a theater nowadays he would not have been content with less than the perfection of that *entourage*. At this he must have allowed that as a dramatist he owed more than his answer implied to the arts which the Shakespeare scholarship of such a manager as this had summoned to his help. As himself an actor-manager, and used to dealing with the work of others and adapting it to the needs of his theater, he would have approved of this actor-manager's cutting of his plays, which I liked so much that when I recurred to the printed text I found little cause to desire it in its entirety, though I do not make so bold as to say that the cuts were unerringly those which Shakespeare would have made himself. I only say something like this; and that in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," for instance, there was no line which I would have had restored for the stage.

It was the personal companionableness of Shakespeare, his modest, his humorous capacity of self-forgetfulness which made him so delightful. I am sure that in his visits to the Memorial Theater (which perhaps he did not visit oftener because of a natural diffidence) he would have liked as much as I did its quality of home, the charming sense of hospitality and domesticity, in which people met each other, and nodded and smiled from orchestra and balcony, and went about between the acts shaking hands, like neighbors akin in their common love of the Supreme Poet whom we so felt there the brother of us all. It was not my happy fortune to be there the last night of the happy season, but I have heard that the genial audience then for farewell took hands all round the theater and sang "Auld Lang Syne" together.

That must have been beautiful, but what event, what moment of the joyous season was not beautiful? When we came out of the theater at the modest hours which the theater keeps in Stratford we continued, as it were, a part of the cast in whatever play we had been seeing, and under the stars of the dim English heaven, or its mild moon, we took our way up the footpath of Chapel Lane, or confided ourselves fearlessly to the roadway, where a few large-eyed motors purred harmlessly among us. I may not claim that they paused to let us look about for the lame cat of New Place gardens, or deny that they sometimes urged us on with those porcine gutturals peculiar to motors. But we heard in them only the ghostly echoes from the styes which fenced New Place along Chapel Street and Chapel Lane in Shakespeare's time. There was no ghostliest taint from these in our twentieth-century air, but the honeyed odor of the sweet alyssum from the beds beside the gates of New Place gardens stole through the grating and haunted us to our dreams.

AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

CHAPTER XI

TWICE a week, in the gardens of the theater, there were Morris Dances and Country Dances by the pupil-teachers, whom we could see every morning at the lectures in the Parish Parlor. These joyous events were called by the severe and self-reproachful name of Demonstrations, but by any name they would have been enchanting, as in fact their subtitles were. What could be more quaintly dear than *Beaux of London City*, by the young men, or *Brighton Camp* by the girls, or *The Rose*, or *Confess* by both youths and maidens? There was a sword dance, and there were Morris Dances, when the dancers beat the sward with their feet to make the bells on their legs help rouse the mother earth to their adoration. For a contrast to the lusty blonde English girls, there were two lithe Greek maidens come from their far shores to fly like Mænads on a Grecian urn in the wild figures of those northern dances; but best of all there was a veteran Morris Dancer now getting in years, who had been famous in his day, and who gave the dance with a sort of dying vigor and a stiff grace of gesture very pathetic and appealing.

The sun blazed down on the place, but there was life in the air, and by the Avon's banks the feathery reeds swayed and tilted in the light wind and waved us to the stream. The water was alive with the punts and skiffs and canoes which are coming and going on it the whole summer; my muse must not be too fastidious to sing also the steam and motor barges which all too swiftly but very

cheaply bear the poorer pleasurer to the head of navigation a few miles up. But we were not so poor as that, and we took a boat, ample but not beyond the strength of a half-grown boy who at times let his head hang heavily on his breast as if overwearied with rowing. Perhaps it was only a mute entreaty for our larger largesse in the end, and if so I must allow that it was successful; but it was not practised so much going as coming, and we mingled even gaily with the other boats and punts. In England when a youth and maiden go on a water excursion it is, as I have already noted, the convention for the youth to lie flat in the bottom of the punt and for the maiden to stand or sit at his head and push the craft along. If it is two girls who man the boat, then the weaker does the work, and the stronger does the rest; or if they are both very strong, then they both lie idling over books, and there is no telling how they get to a given point. We easily passed these brave or dear crews, and contrived not to be run down by the populous launches that passed us.

At first as you ascend the Avon after you have cleared the two bridges arching the stream, there are pretty villas on the right, and on the left there are pleasant meadows where on the afternoon of our voyage we saw some of the folk-dancers, who were encamped there, going about their light housekeeping among the tents, in the short skirts and the long stockings of their folk-dancing costume. On the other shore the villa gardens came down to the water, and when we were past the gardens both shores were overhung with willows which twisted their roots together and kept the banks firm against the freshets seasonably overflowing them. Under the braided roots the water-rats had their holes, but kept acceptably within them, for water-rats when visible are a very loathsome sight, and I should be sorry to associate them with the

river which Shakespeare was the Swan of. Other swans are not conspicuous in my remembrance, though there must have been swans, unless they had all merged their dying notes in the exultant strains of the surviving gramophones. Of the gramophones there is no manner of doubt; but we were chiefly bent in ascending the river on arriving at a certain tea-garden which we had heard was to be found midway of our course. We found it, but found it shut, and then there was nothing for us but to row, or make our boy row, a mile further to Teddington, where he was sure of a tea-house which was open.

While he remained with his boat at the landing there we took the path which led past picturesque thatched cottages and beside green meadows, ushered onward by sign-boards to the inn where we were to find tea, as we hoped in the moment of its "first sprightly running." But when we got to the inn it appeared that the gas-fixtures had suffered some disaster, and were undergoing repairs, with the tea-room in the possession of several plumber-like men whose presence boded no refection in it. Instead we were offered a small dining-room, so dismal in dark-red paper and so haunted with the memories of bad dinners, that we implored the kind, incapable-looking host to let us have our tea in the garden. We then found ourselves under a tree in the yard behind the house at a table which had known so much rustic jollity that it bore traces of the riot ineffaceable by the wet cloth smeared over it by the slattern maid. She tried to hide them with the table-cloth, but the table-cloth was in league with them, and showed worse stains, which in turn would not be hidden by the plates and cups dispersed among them. There we sat and waited, realizing more and more that the garden was an innyard and the innyard was a farmyard with evidence of every variety of poultry in it. Feathers, with straw and chips, such as chickens delight

in, seemed to grow up out of the gravel under our feet. There had been a dog which went and a cat which came and went, and then there began to be more and more cocks and hens which remained from the beginning. While we waited and waited long, the chickens were reinforced in closing upon us by troops of ducks and geese from some reserve of poultry beyond the stables. A man opened a gate from the adjacent field, and entered with a flock of sheep; in the pasture beyond we heard the lowing of cows and the neighing of horses, which put their heads over the bars as if to urge a passage to our table; we heard the note of remoter swine in unseen pens; and we began to ask each other when we were, if ever, going to have tea. Secretly we had each begun to hope we were never going to have it, and inquiry at the kitchen developed the fact that the range had sympathized with the gas-fixtures, and the fire was in doubt whether it would burn or not. We decided we could not wait the result of its misgiving, and began some polite *pour parlers* with the landlord, we insisting that we would pay for our tea and go without waiting for it, and he insisting that we should not pay for it without having it. In the end we paid and escaped triumphing without our tea, but feeling rather sorry that we had got the better of that poor man; though now, upon reflection, I am not sure that we had got the better of him.

It was an afternoon of anomalies, which in that neat, well-ordered England, where custom and tradition prevail as with the authority of holy writ, were startling past all former experience. When once your mind is set on tea in England, you are, though an alien, as inflexible as any born to the manner; and when we had got back to our boat we made our boy make all haste down the Avon to the pretty tea-garden we had noted lurking with its tables among leaves and flowers. But as we came in full sight

of that pretty tea-garden we suffered a moment's dismay at the sight of a punt lolling full-length at the landing, and apparently not proposing to move away for us. A youth of the usual years and an unusually elderly maiden, or say matron, occupied themselves with tea and cake in it; and when it reluctantly got from the landing, and we mounted to the garden, we were almost held from ordering tea for ourselves by the unprecedented spectacle of an elderly gentleman standing by a tea-laden table, and serving from it the youth and the maiden, or matron, in the punt with tea and bread-and-butter and ultimately cake, quite as if he had himself been in the punt and they serving him. Whether to attribute the strange fact to the all-pervading balefulness of Mr. Lloyd George or not we did not know. Perhaps with his equal taxes and old-age pensions he was really bringing the landed gentry to things like this; for this gentleman looked landed gentry and county family, if ever a gentleman did. I must not push the matter too far; I must not say he looked a title, even so low as baronet; but under that he might have been anything but a knight recognized for some service to civilization He was perfectly dressed in the well-studied propriety of an English gentleman out for an afternoon's pleasure, down to his gaiters; he stood at his quiet ease beside that table, pouring the tea and cutting the cake, with a rather dreamy air, unconscious of the curiosity to know how he happened, which tormented, and has never ceased to torment us since, concerning him. From time to time he carried a cup or a plate to the people in the punt, which had come back to its moorings, and leaned over to bestow it on one or other of them, who took it with equal calm, and let him go on serving them. But it was no servile service which he offered and they accepted; it was rather the courtesy of host and guests of the tacit, unflourishing fashion of English society where

to make the thing done seem not to have been done is the fine ideal. No word passed between them; the youth did not look an invalid, the matron not quite the mother of so old a youth. But in any case why was not she serving the two men? Why was that elder serving her, if for any reason he was serving the youth?

The tea-maiden ran across the street and fetched our refection from the inn there, and spread our table beside the barrier opposite this strange gentleman's, equally overhung with plum-trees and dividing him as ours divided us from borders of gay marigolds and phlox and patches of cabbage and cauliflower in the gardens beyond. The yellow-jackets, which the English call wasps, came instinctively at the call of our jam, and we saw them hovering about his fearless head as he stooped over his table or moved from it to feed or slake the famine of the people in the punt; and when we had escaped unstung from our own refreshment, we left him with his gentle riddle unread, and let our droop-headed boy pull us back to the boat-house where we had taken him. The tea at Teddington had been disappointing if it could be said to have been at all; and that last tea, which had certainly been, had left us with a thirst which I do not know how we shall ever quench. Yet that excursion up and down the Avon had been so surpassing an ideal of an excursion on the Avon, that we said, "Now we should certainly do it every day." The surprising part is that we never did it again.

CHAPTER XII

THE days at Stratford were so full of breakfasting, lunching, and dining, with lectures on folk dancing and folk singing, and debates on ethical and esthetical matters between, and drives into the country, and afternoon teas and calls, that it was with difficulty I could squeeze in or out an hour for so favorite diversion of mine as the Moving Picture Show. But at last the hour lent itself to the desire, and I went to that Picture Theater which does not feel itself too presumptuous in almost fronting the Shakespeare Monument. Perhaps it is kept in countenance by the badness of the monument in one art and its own excellence in another, but if I ventured into the Picture Theater without knowing its grounds for self-confidence my own trust in it was rewarded by the prevalence, so flattering to my patriotism, the almost exclusive prevalence, of American films in its events. The events were of that romantic character so easily attributable to the life of our Far West, and especially that life as it was touched, by the only a little more distinctively romantic life of our aborigines, still supposed to linger in a tribal condition before merging in our body politic as landholders in severalty and prospective citizens. In this condition they were provisionally making war on the white men, galloping round on their ponies along the brows and summits of hills which threw them into strong relief, and permitted them a splendor of action equally glorious in advance and retreat. Their forays were connected with

the love-interest embodied in the reciprocal passion of a young lieutenant and the daughter of the commanding general, who conspired with an elderly colonel to frustrate their affection by throwing the lieutenant into the power of the savages, and securing his betrothed for his ranking officer. The betrayal and the rescue were effected with the incessant discharge of firearms, sensible to the eye only, between Indians and cowboys and cavalrymen, which eventuated in the triumph of the American forces with much waving of star-spangled banners.

The audience was composed almost wholly of school-children; I was the only spectator distinctly in the decline of life; and among the children there was one of years so few and sensibilities so tender, that in spite of his sympathy with the American forces, he damped the general joy by bursting into a cry of alarm at the moment of their triumph, and having to be led howling up the aisle into the safety of the outer air. His grief touched me so that I could not take the pride I might have wished in the fact that of the six dramas presented that afternoon four were shown from American films, and two from French ones, with not a single English film among them, not even of those municipal receptions of royalty which the English fondness commonly wreaks itself in reproducing on the cinematographic screen, with little variety of costume for the king and an inflexible devotion to one walking-dress and one austere, reproving hat in the queen.

I could not remain after this tragic incident, and I followed the emotional sufferer out, hoping to supply the reassurance which seemed to fail from his more immediate friends. But before I reached the door I was aware of one of these mystical presences at my shoulder which I was now grown used to, and which I supposed of course was Shakespeare. On the contrary, as I looked round, I

saw that it was Bacon, and I said with surprise: "Oh! *You* here?"

"Yes," he said, with some resentment of my tone, "I am here a good deal, first and last."

"Yes?" I queried, to gain time, without committing myself further.

"Why don't these stupid people say something to comfort that little boy?" he demanded, without noting my query, and I perceived that his shadowy shape was in a quiver of compassion for the sensitive youngster. This ought not to have surprised me, and upon reflection I perceived that it was the logic of a man who had often been so pitiless in this life that he should be all pity in another life; that would be not only his eager atonement, his expiation; it would be his privilege, his highest happiness. To go through eternity compassionating every form of suffering here would be a refuge from vain regrets, and such solace as comes to us whenever we disown some misdeed by doing the opposite. I wished to speak with him on this point, but I saw he was not concerned with me; he was somehow addressing himself to the terrified child, who suddenly stopped his roaring and looked round smiling as if he expected to see a kind face at his shoulder. I knew he would see none, and Bacon instantly ceased to occupy himself with him.

"Yes," he resumed with me, "I think there is a great deal to be hoped from this sort of show, and I am interested in every advance made in its art. If I were in authority here I would not permit these spectacles of battle, or any terrifying circumstance. There is an infinite range of subjects which could be shown for the instruction as well as the delight of those little ones; all 'the fairy tales of science,' all the works of nature, all the beautiful and cheering events of history."

"I'm afraid the Shakespeareans would say," I answered,

"that you don't show the author-actor's instinct in that notion, and that such a notion alone was enough to disprove your friends' claim to your authorship of the plays. You know how bloody his scene is—and advisedly so. We like a noble terror—all but our young friend here."

He did not reply, but said: "I believe that in the United States you now have the characters in the films speaking: talking-movies, I think you call them. You are very graphic, you Americans!"

"Oh, thank you! They're not quite satisfactory, yet. There is speech, but it doesn't seem somehow to come from the speakers, though their lips move."

"You must trust your Mr. Edison to bring the affair to perfection. A most ingenious man; a sort of up-to-date version of your great Franklin. I don't wonder your people value him and have voted him one of your supreme benefactors."

"Your lordship must excuse me," I said, "if I'm still a little surprised that a philosopher like yourself, who changed the whole course, if not the nature, of philosophy, should be so much interested in people who are after all merely inventors, however beneficent."

"Have you read your Macaulay to so little purpose," he rejoined, "as not to have seen how he distinguishes between the new and the old philosophies in his essay on me by pointing out that my philosophy dedicated itself to use, while that of the Greeks disdained the practical as something beneath the notice of the idealist?"

"Yes, yes," I said, "I certainly remember that; and here I hesitated from an embarrassing recollection of the severity of Macaulay's essay on the facts of Bacon's career.

"I know he was terribly hard upon me in the first half of his essay," Bacon returned, as if I had spoken. "But he let me have the last word, as it were. The whole

second half of his essay is devoted to the recognition of my claim upon the forgiveness—I won't say gratitude—of mankind because of my wish to serve them in any humblest fashion, of my will always to hitch a star to my wagon, if I may transpose the saying of your Emerson: a very different sort of idealist, by the way, from Plato."

"I know," I answered. "I thought that fine in Macaulay. It was only fair, though, to let you have the last word."

"In my office of judge, in which I confessed and must always confess that I brought the judgment seat to shame, though I only did what the other judges did in my time, it often occurred to me that it was a gross injustice in our procedure to let the prosecution, the state, have the closing appeal to the jury. That should be the sacred right of the defense—"

"Ah, if you could only have expressed that in some axiom, embodied it in some decision!" I exclaimed. "That injustice is always a grief to me whenever I read the report of a criminal trial. That the last word should be for the rigor instead of the mercy of the law, that seems barbarous, atrocious."

"But as we were saying of the cinema—the movies, as you call it in your wonderful slang—I believe there is indefinite development for that form of the drama in the direction of education. But why am I saying this to you? You who first suggested the notion to me in one of your papers."

I was inexpressibly flattered. "Is it possible," I asked, "that so great a man as you, in your exalted sphere, keeps up with our periodical literature? How have you the time for it?"

"We have the eternity for it," he said, with a sad smile for the word play. "Besides you exaggerate my importance in the world of immortality. I assure you that there

the lowliest of our race who has only a record of humble goodness counts before me."

I stood rebuked. "Oh, excuse me; I didn't reflect. But now as to the movies: you see a great dramatic future in them?"

"Ah, *that* you must have out with Shakespeare. You'll find him in the gardens of the Birthplace; I've no doubt he'll try to persuade you that the Elizabethan drama was the last word in that way."

"Well, Shakespeare is always Shakespeare, you know!" I said.

"I'm glad he isn't always Bacon," the philosopher replied. "I shouldn't mind having written the sonnets; but the 'Venus and Adonis,' the 'Lucrece,' and some of the plays—excuse me! Honestly, would *you* like to have written 'Pericles, Prince of Tyre' or 'A Comedy of Errors'?"

Before I could protest my companion had left me to continue my way to the Birthplace alone. It was only a little walk from the Picture Theater, but I was not surprised to find next morning had come when I reached the house endeared to the world by the universally cherished fiction that Shakespeare was born in it. Thirteen thousand Americans are said to visit it every year, and I had already joined them twice in their tacit atonement there for the Baconian heresy which our nation invented. I had been there in fact only a few days before, and now I passed through the house into the garden without staying to visit the thronged rooms above or below. As I expected I found the shade of Shakespeare in the shelter of a far descendant of his contemporary mulberry-tree, and he courteously dematerialized me for the forbidden passage over the grass to a seat with him at its root.

"Well," he said, smiling, "so you have shirked even the birth-room in the Birthplace where I was not born?"

"Yes—since you have divined it. I have no grudge against that superstition except that it has thronged the place so with the devout that one can't breathe there very well. Besides, I have done it twice already."

"And the Museum and Library, with the Original Legal Documents of the family possessions, and the signatures of my family (they seem to have abounded in autographs so much more than I), and the early editions of my plays, and my signet-ring, and my sixteenth-century school-desk, and all the rest of it? And the Timber-roofed Room overhead, with the portraits and poor old Quiney's begging letter to me? And the Kitchen and the Living-room, where we used to feed and foregather?"

"Yes; and revered everything with unquestioning faith."

"Well, why shouldn't you, if you believe in me? Of course I wasn't born in my Birthplace, but I lived most of my boyhood in this house—or till I escaped to London, some say from the law, and some from the hopeless dullness of Stratford, though then there was no great outlook for me here with my wife and three children. Do my biographers say I brought Anne home here to live with me in this house? It would have been like my father to let me; he was a kind man and muddled away his money like many another kind man. He once said of me, 'Will was a good, honest fellow, and he darest have cracked a jest with him at any time,' which has been a great comfort to the biographers as material and as inferential evidence that I wrote my plays. And my mother, my dear mother, would have been a loving mother-in-law to Anne, as mothers-in-law go. Or do the biographers prefer to conjecture that I went home with Anne to Shottery? Been to Shottery yet?"

"Not this time; but I'm going."

"Let me go with you. I think I can make some things

clearer to you there. So you found his lordship at the Picture Theater?"

"Yes. I was rather surprised of his interest in the movies."

"But why? He would have told you in his Latin that he counted nothing human alien to him because he was human himself, and he especially likes all manner of new inventions. He would rather have invented your talking-movies, I believe, than written some of my plays, say"—and here Shakespeare smiled knowingly at me—"'Pericles of Tyre' or 'A Comedy of Errors.'"

I laughed with guilty consciousness, but I said, hardily, "He *couldn't* have written them."

"Well, I don't know," he returned, and then he laughed out. "*I* didn't, you know—or not entirely. In my day we took our own whenever the other fellows left it; and those are not the only plays of mine which I didn't write entirely. Well, it was an understood thing; there was the raw material, and each of us worked it up after his own fancy."

"But I rather wonder," I said, "at Bacon's interest in those mechanical inventions, which are a good deal in the nature of mechanical toys. Now the discovery of a general principle, or the application of it to some useful end—"

"I suppose he thinks harmless amusement and painless instruction are useful ends to be reached by the movies. And as he never could write plays he may hope to supplant the written and acted drama with them. You know that in Italy they've already supplanted the Marionette drama."

"No!" I cried, and I felt a pang of the keenest regret. "Not the wriggling plays of the time-honored masks, operated by strings overhead and vocalized by many voices in one, squeaked and growled from behind—not

Arlecchino, and Pantalone, and Brighella, and Facanapa and Il Dottore, and Policinella, and the rest—"

"Swept by the board, all gone, before the devastating film. I was down in Venice, last night, at the little theater where you used to see them, and they were doing a Wild West movie piece just such as you saw to-day; and it's the same everywhere in Italy."

I was dumb with grief, and he hastened to turn the subject a little. "But it's not only your application of mechanics to the drama which interests our friend. He's much more interested in your Pure Food movement. He doesn't at all sympathize, though, with the Anti-Cold Storage Crusade, which seems rather to have fallen through, by the by. He believes *he* discovered the principles of cold storage. You know he brought on his mortal sickness by leaving his coach on a very cold day and stopping at a farm-house to get a dressed hen which he stuffed with snow."

I said I thought I remembered.

"The experiment was perfectly successful. The hen was preserved till the snow thawed; but Bacon took cold from the exposure and died. He maintains that his experiment was the first embryonic stirring of your gigantic system of Cold Storage."

CHAPTER XIII

THE great poet began to walk up and down and round about over the grass with the impunity of disembodied spirits, and being dematerialized and devisibilized for our more convenient association in the place, I joined him without attracting the notice of the gardener, who was busy watching that predatory visitors did not pillage the beds of their late summer flowers, as they passed down the walk from the house, and round and out by the garden gate. There was a constant stream of visitors, and I said to my companion: "How does all this affect you, this influx and efflux of people, who after three hundred years have read you, or heard of you, or would like to have read you, or to whom you're at least such an object of interest that no traveler ought to miss seeing your Birthplace?"

"How do you mean?"

"Does their devotion bless you or ban you? Is it a joy or a bore? To me it looks like a perpetual afternoon tea where people are asked 'To have the honor of meeting the memory of William Shakespeare,' and expect somehow to feel that they're with you."

"Well, I don't know," he answered, thoughtfully. "It isn't so bad as to have to stand tangibly in the middle of the Museum and shake hands with them all. They don't know that I'm personally present, and in fact I'm not here, for the most part."

"Yes, I understand that. But I suppose what I am

trying to get at is whether the sense of their admiration is still as sweet as ever? Do you care for it as much as one does for a favorable notice of his new book with suggestive extracts? Something like that."

"No, I shouldn't say I did; though not because it's rather an old story now. The fact is that their admiration rather searches out the seamy side of my work, where I've put it together and patched it out with that material of the older playwrights which we Elizabethans used to draw from. It isn't pleasant to have people thinking it's all mine, you know."

"I understand. But I *don't* understand how they ever mistake the work you helped yourself to for your own work. It seems to me that I can tell the borrowed from the created down to the last syllable. I make out that you helped yourself most in the comedies; at least I have to skip the most in them. You don't mind my skipping?"

"Oh, I skip a good deal myself; and yes, I used the paste and scissors most in the comedies; scarcely at all in the tragedies, even those dramatized from the old Italian stories. But at the time I was doing my things, I didn't distinguish much in the result. When I had got it on the stage all right, it seemed entirely mine, you know. It was when it came to printing the things that I began to feel the force of Polonius's injunction: 'Neither a borrower nor a lender he.' I saw then that I had borrowed more than I should ever lend. But I didn't worry much. You know I was rather lazy about the printed plays; I never read the proofs; and of course I never 'blotted a line' in the printed text any more than the written. After I came back to Stratford I left the whole affair to the compositors and the actors. I was pretty thoroughly tired."

"I can imagine that. And this ever-gathering volume,

this constantly increasing reverberation of men's praise, how does that affect you?"

"Well, you know, not so unpleasantly as you might think. I suppose I'm rather simple about it. My London success didn't make me very conscious, I believe. At the time I didn't always feel it was *me* they were praising. One loses identity in those experiences. I didn't always feel as if I had done the things, and they have gone on ever since becoming more and more impersonal to me. I don't know whether I make myself quite clear. But that's the way I manage to stand it."

"Yes, I see," I said.

"What I had done well seemed to become part of the great mass of good work done that belonged to nobody in particular."

"I don't know that I should altogether like that," I demurred.

Shakespeare laughed genially. "Well, you would if you had done much good work. Now you want to keep your little own all your own."

I was wondering what to say when a dreadful inaudible voice struck upon my inner ear in no-tones of inexpressible tragedy, "And the evil done, the sin, the wrong?"

It was Bacon who had joined us, speaking to Shakespeare, and Shakespeare, nothing surprised at his presence, unanswered: "Why, even more the evil than the good. Haven't you said, somewhere"—he turned to me in asking, and I perceived a delicate intention of soothing the hurt to my self-love which his snub had given—"haven't you said, somewhere, that when we own a sin, whether to others or to our consciences, we *dis*own it, and it becomes a part of the general evil in the world?"

"Why, it seems to me that I *did* say that," I answered, gratified to my inmost soul. "But how did you know—"

"Never mind, never mind," he said, laying his hand

caressingly on my shoulder. "Haven't I told you that we read everything? We have no end of leisure."

The somber shade of Bacon remained silently ignoring this exchange of civilities. At last he said to me, "And from what experience of yours did you learn that truth?"

"Oh, come!" Shakespeare answered, lightly. "Isn't this asking?"

I stood recalling my many sins and hesitating which I should credit with the suggestion of my dark wisdom. "Well, I don't know," I parleyed; but I saw that Bacon really cared nothing for *my* sins, and was only thinking of his own.

"If I could believe that!" he passionately declared. "No sinner ever made opener or ampler avowal of his guilt than I did."

"You couldn't help it, my dear friend," Shakespeare put in, with a smile which if mocking was tenderly mocking. "You had been tried and convicted by your peers before you owned up. Your sin had found you out, and I fancy that our brave moralist here means that we must own the sins which haven't found us out if we wish to disown them. I have come to much the same effect by not denying mine, till now I haven't any wish to deny them. But why should you continue to bother about yours? You were guilty of bribery and corruption, but, as you said, all the other judges were. It was a vice of our epoch, like my vices, which I was not ashamed of then, I'm now ashamed to say. My comedies abound in the filth of them, though not so much as some other people's comedies; and I dare say there were judges more venal than you. But perhaps it's the sin which you didn't own; perhaps it was the case of—"

"Essex?" the unhappy ghost demanded. "Haven't I owned it to him a thousand times? Haven't I pursued him through all the timeless and spaceless reaches of

eternity with my unavailing remorse? Hasn't he forgiven me, entreated me to forgive myself, with that goodness of his which abounded to me in my unfriended need with every generous office of praise and purse, and which I repaid by hunting him to his death? Don't tell me that in a few years he must have died even if I had not slain him! Don't tell me that so open a rebel as he must have suffered death, even if I had not shut the gates of mercy on him. I, who owed him far dearer and truer allegiance than I owed that wretched old woman whom I called my sovereign, and whom I thought to serve to my own glory and profit by persecuting my friend!"

Shakespeare looked at him with a curious kind of pity. "What a tragedy you *could* have written! How you could have out-Hamleted and out-Macbethed me!"

"Why not do it yet?" I appealed to them both. "I am sure that any of our editors would be glad to print it, and it would be only a step from the magazine to the stage. With our improved psychical facilities it would be easy to find some adequate medium—"

The abject spirit's mood changed, and he demanded, scornfully: "And *prove* that I wrote 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth,' too? No, thanks. I couldn't do anything to re-open that chapter. And if I must say it, I don't envy the author of those plays the gross and palpable renown which he enjoys from them. I can bear what I must bear till somehow I am released from my burden; people don't know how bad I am; many never heard of me as a recreant friend or a corrupt magistrate; they only know me as the author of the inductive method, which they don't understand, or as the putative author of Shakespeare's plays, which they haven't read, not even the fatuous thirteen thousand Americans who annually visit his Birthplace—the Birthplace where he first came to live after he was a well-grown boy! Of all the hollow

unrealities, of all the juiceless husks which human vanity feeds on, literary glory seems to me the emptiest and dryest. If among those thirteen thousand Americans, or the hundred thousand other pilgrims who troop annually to this supposititous shrine, there were one utterly sincere and modest soul; if in this whole town of Stratford there were one simple lower-class person who loved Shakespeare for himself, or cared for him, or even knew of him, I would grant him some joy of his swollen celebrity, his Falstaffian bulk of fame stuffed out with straw."

"I have thought of that," I put in, while Shakespeare remained placidly smiling. "It's a point that I've wanted to test. We all knew how the comfortable and cultivated people feel about our great and good friend, but I've been curious, ever since I came to Stratford, to know how people who are not particularly comfortable and not at all cultivated feel about him. I believe I have in mind just the person to apply to," and at my volition there came a sort of tremor such as when the pictures change at the movies, and we were standing in the little cluttered shop of the kind woman who sold me the plums for my lunches.

While she was doing up the pound, half of green gages and half of victorias, which I ordered, I said: "Oh, by the way, my friends and I here"—she stared, and I explained—"*here in Stratford,* have been wondering how much the townspeople, the tradespeople, the workpeople really know or care about Shakespeare. What do you think?"

"What do I—no, it's only sevenpence, sir; a penny less than for *all* green gages—what do I think?"

"Yes. Do you honestly care anything about Shakespeare?"

She looked up a little bewildered. Then she said, "Why, how could we live without him, sir?"

The ghostly presence of the poet laughed inaudiblv

out. "There you have it! I am my townsmen's stock in trade, their livelihood, their job! They couldn't live without me! Well, I'm not sorry if that's what I come to with them."

"At any rate, in that you come to something *real*," the philosopher assented.

CHAPTER XIV

Upon the whole I was glad not to have the company of the great poet on the way to Shottery, whither we drove that afternoon. The difficulty of conversing with a disembodied spirit while driving with people still of our earthly minority is considerable; the lightning changes from mortal to immortal is what ladies call nerve-racking; and the anxiety not to lose anything that such a spirit as Shakespeare might say must result in an inattention to the others which would seem impolite to say the least.

It is an easy walk from Stratford to Shottery, but the drive is still easier, and by a road pleasanter, I think, than the foot-path across the fields which Shakespeare probably took when he went wooing Anne Hathaway. We ought now to have thought of that courtship, but if the truth must be told we were amusing ourselves unworthily enough in counting up the number of perambulators which so abound in Stratford, and which seemed all to be taking their way that afternoon to Shottery, as if they too were going to Anne Hathaway's cottage. I forget how many there were by the time we reached the curving streets of the hamlet, but before we got out of Stratford there were twenty-one, sometimes with twins in them, all preparing in one way or other to make their living off the memory of their mighty townsman; for I do not suppose there was a baby among them so ungrateful as to believe in the Baconian authorship.

Shottery streets are curving, and of a rustic prettiness,

with sincere Kate Greenway cottages set practicable behind little gardens, after you get away from the suburban trimness of the houses nearest Stratford. Sincere and practicable as the rest, with the largest and brightest of the little gardens, the Anne Hathaway cottage was instantly recognizable by the throngs of sight-seers within and about its gates. The sight-seers were instantly recognizable, in the vast majority as American girls, waiting their turn in faintly sarcastic patience to be admitted to the cottage, and joking or at least smiling together, at other American girls who packed its doorways. Their sarcastic patience was the national mood in which we Americans face most problems of life, and it commended them, somehow, more than the varying expression of the other visitors arriving in huge motor-omnibus loads, and by carriage and automobile and on foot from every part of the world. In a way the spectacle was preposterous; but the afternoon was beautiful, and the cottage stood unconscious amidst its flowery creepers, looking gently from its latticed windows at the multitude and drawing its thatch over its eaves in a sort of tolerant surprise. In its simple memories of the courtship which had so amazingly consecrated it, one could imagine also a dismay at the outcome, such as poor Anne Hathaway herself must have felt if she had been there. It was her home and her people's home, and they too might well have been bewildered at such a far effect from her marriage with the rather wild young Shakespeare lad whose family was certainly no better than hers, and who had not behaved too well, though as things went in that day and place no worse than many others. One could fancy an irreconcilable feeling in the place, as the dense crowd pushed from room to room, and up-stairs and down, and elbowed and gasped and perspired and tried for some personal significance to each in their presence there. None could have denied

that the custodians who led from room to room and delivered the crowd over from one to another did their intelligent best to realize this for them. For myself I felt an appeal in it which I could not well express. The decency of the whole place, with the propriety of the furnishings, mostly typical, of course, rather than original, but to me somehow recalling the simplicities of the new American country where I had seen like things in old pioneer dwellings, was touching. It was much to be shown an illustrative rushlight, and how, when it was crossed, one might burn the candle at both ends, as the proverb says; and it was much to see a rush bed, with the mattress resting on the rope webbing, familiar to me from the many movings of my childhood, when the cords had to be trodden and tightened into a reluctant elasticity by the paternal foot.

I was expecting throughout the presence which it seemed to me ought to make itself sensible, there, and when we came to that room where there is a rude settle built into the chimney-place, and our cicerone said, "This is where the young people used to do most of their courting," I felt in the words, few and simple, the thrill of a pathos imperishable as the soul itself, the richness of the race's experience of youth and love, not alienable by circumstance or effaceable by death itself.

"Now, surely," I thought, "he will act upon the hint," but then instantly I felt the vulgarity of my expectation. It was not of Anne Hathaway, his sweetheart, that Shakespeare would have spoken there as he had once spoken of Anne his aging wife; or make this the occasion of defending her fame against his own. Doubtless this was his tacit way of fulfilling his half promise to be with me at Shottery; he was making me divine the case for myself. I joined the mass of humanity descending the stairs in bulk, and separating its crumpled particles in a recovered

severalty where those American girls sat smiling ironically but resolutely waiting to appropriate our experience.

In Shottery there is a tea-garden prettily called after Portia, and to this we went thirsting for her promptest brew, which was served us in one of her pleached bowers of plum-trees weighed down by their purple burden of victorias. We found ourselves very hungry as well as thirsty, and ordered jam with the bread and butter which comes by nature with tea in England; but the jam was a mistake. Almost as soon as it came a swarm of yellow-jackets came and proposed sharing it with us. This is what the English yellow-jackets always do; but it seemed as if the Portia kept swarms of them, to let loose upon ignorant strangers and frighten them into surrendering the jam which they have ordered and must pay for. The plan, if it was a plan, succeeded perfectly in our case. The yellow-jackets swooped upon us, and we instantly called to have the jam taken away, but even with the removal of the jam the yellow-jackets did not go; they remained humming and buzzing, and demanding explanations which we were not able to give. Then they possessed themselves of our bread and butter, and even threatened our tea, which we had to gulp hastily and as it were by stealth. We feared they might follow us to our fly, but our rout seemed to bewilder them; and we left them darkly murmuring in the air above our table after we paid and fled.

"A little more of this," I said, as we drove out of Shottery, while the over-laden motorbusses passed earthquakingly by us, "a little more, and I shall begin to believe in the Bacon authorship."

AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

CHAPTER XV

THERE was a delicate touch of autumn in the air that revived my drooping faith; and the color of the haws and reddening leaves in the untrimmed hedges consoled; so that after a night's sleep we were ready for the evidence of the school where Shakespeare got his "small Latin and less Greek." The row of old timbered buildings, low, red-tiled, with the second-story overhang, stretches away from the Guild Chapel with not much distinction between the Grammar School and the endearing almshouses in which one could well desire to be a pauper such as often stood at the doorways and looked so willing to have us come in. We rashly put off doing that till another time, and so never did it, but we felt that the place where it is so vigorously imagined by his biographers that Shakespeare laid the foundations of his versatility could not wait, and we lost no time at last in visiting the school-room opening out of the Guild Hall on the upper floor. In the Guild Hall the heart of faith affirms that the boy sometime came with his father to see the passing shows, which made Stratford a one-night stand in those days, and that he studied or idled in the school-room under a certain window at a desk now devoutly removed to the Birthplace; but there was not much to do with the conviction after we were possessed of it. Dr. Furnivall, in whom it is very strong, ekes it out in his life of Shakespeare with the picturesque portrayal of such a school-boy as Shakespeare would have been if he had been one; and this may be

taken as one of the strongest proofs of the Shakespearean authorship.

Our visit was tardily paid on one of our very last days in Stratford, and then we said we must go again to Holy Trinity Church, which we had not yet satisfyingly seen because of the crowds of mere sight-seers infesting the place. With such people I felt that we had nothing in common, and it seemed as if Providence recognized our difference in timing our arrival at the churchyard gate just as one large company should be coming out and no other yet going in. It was a little bewildering to find this departing company Germans, and personally conducted by an English-speaking Japanese.

"Oh, stranger things than that happen here," the gracious Shade, who greeted me at the church-door, said, when I noted the quaint fact to him; he was always so delightfully modern in his acceptance of circumstance. He lingered outside a moment in the sweet, bright air as if his genial spirit could sense the morning's loveliness like one still in the body. "I'm particularly glad to meet you to-day because I'm thinking of leaving Stratford for a while."

"Leaving Stratford!" I marveled.

"Yes; August is almost gone, and it will be a little dull here after the theater is closed, and the folk-dancing and singing is over, and the lectures are all finished. Bacon is gone already."

"Bacon gone!" I stupidly repeated.

"Yes; he couldn't stand it; he felt that I was becoming spoiled by the sickening adulation, as he called it."

"But you're not!" I protested.

"No; and I don't suppose he really believed it. The fact is he can't be away from London for a great while when once we return to Time. He finds a greater concourse of spirits there, the new arrivals as well as the old,

and of course more variety. We can't wonder at his preferring it."

"No," I faltered.

"Besides, it's one of the conditions, you know, that he must visit Tower Hill where he brought Essex to his death, and Westminster Hall, where he used to sit and judge the suitors from whom he had taken bribes."

"Why, but I thought that old notion of eternal punishment— Then, after all, there is a—"

"Do you call three hundred years eternal? Well, yes, there *is* a sort of hell. But there is no punishment; there is only consequence, and there is the relief of doing penance."

"And does it last forever—the consequence?"

"How do I know, with my little three centuries' experience? I only know that when I meet Bacon after one of these seasons of expiation he is a great deal lighter and cheerfuler, better company; he isn't so censorious, so critical; not that I ever minded criticism much, or do now; especially as it's quite impossible to revise my work at this late day."

"Your editors are always doing it," I said, thoughtfully.

"They're not nearly drastic enough for Bacon. He would out-Ben Ben Jonson in blotting. Sometimes I could wish he *had* written the plays," and the amiable Shade laughed out his enjoyment of the notion. "But come! I'm keeping you; you want to see the church."

"There's no hurry," I began, but suddenly the Shade became a part of the bright air, and I turned to my companions. "Well, let us go in," I said.

"No; we've seen it once already. We'll go and walk in the meadows along the Avon till you come out."

I was glad they had not apparently noticed anything out of the common; and I considered that perhaps the

incident just closed had not had more than a dream's space in its occurrence.

Within, the light of the church, strained through its colored windows, was of a brightness softer than that of the light outside, but still of a very unwonted brightness in an English church. There was a sort of cheer in it such as ought always to lift the heart in a church, above other places; it was like the almost gaiety of an Italian church. A few people were going about with their guide-books in their hands, and staring round to identify the monuments. But I went directly up to the chancel where the Shakespeare tombs are, and where there was now a kind-looking verger dusting and brushing. I tried to satisfy the desire I had for a better acquaintance with the painted bust above the poet's tablet, which overlooks the famous stone with its conditional malediction in the floor; but after craning my neck this side and that in vain, I ventured to ask the verger if they ever let people inside the chancel rail. Why, he argued, if they let many inside, the inscriptions on the stones would be quite worn away; but, he relented, they sometimes made exceptions of those especially interested. Was I especially interested? I tried to look archæological; and he lifted the barrier, and I stood among the monuments of the Shakespeare family, which fill the whole space of the chancel pavement in front of the altar, with the bust of the poet looking over them from its Jacobean setting in the northern wall. In their presence one does not escape the sense of a family party, and of a middle-class satisfied desire of respectability in their reunion. I realized there as never before that the Shakespeares were strictly *bourgeois* in the whole keeping of their lives, and in their death there seems the sort of triumph I have intimated. If there wanted anything to this it was supplied by the presence of the good Doctor John Hall,

whom they doubtless prized above the poet, once a stroller and at best only a successful actor-manager. He came back indeed to Stratford and set up gentleman among his town folks, who could value him at least for his thrift and state. He sued and was sued, he pleaded and was impleaded in lawsuits for the collection of their debts to him; as nearly as such a world-wide spirit could, he led their narrow village life, with an occasional burst from it in the revels which celebrated the visits of his fellow-players and fellow-playwrights when they came down from London in their love of him; it was no light proof of their affection to make the two or three days' journey over such roads as they had then, with footpads and cut-purses along the way. He was then no doubt a scandal to the townsfolk, though they too loved him as every one who ever knew him did, but they must have prized him most for his connection with that honored physician. No doubt when the doctor was laid away with the Shakespeares in that venerable place, the neighbors felt that the family had now risen to be a lasting credit to the town.

"If you will step this way," the verger said, leading me to a spot beyond the poet's bust, "you will see that the nose is aquiline," and so it was, and the whole face was redeemed from commonness by that arch. In fact I do not understand why people should be so severe on this bust; I have just called it common, but it would have been impossible for Shakespeare to look Shakespeare if Michelangelo himself had modeled him, and it seems to me that this painted death-mask serves as well as anything could to represent him.

It looks over, not down on, the silly slab which entreats and threatens the spectator concerning the dust below, and across the somewhat complacent epitaph of Mistress Hall, lying beside her husband, and the meeker monu-

ment of the poet's youngest daughter Judith, and last of all the tomb of Anne Hathaway, his wife. There, after a moment of indignation, I was aware of the immortal Shade rising as from its knees at the foot of this farthest stone. "Oh no, oh no," it read my mind, as always, with that gentleness which seems never to have failed the poet on earth. "Susanna was a bright girl, and a woman tender to all, and the doctor was very well, and Judith was dear to me, too; but they should have put Anne nearest me, though I put her so far away in life so many years. It doesn't matter to us now, of course, where we have each other forever, but here our parting seems to cast blame on her. They should change my bust and epitaph to this southern wall."

"I'm glad you feel so," I expressed, "and I like your implying here, above all places, that you had not the feeling which they read into your words about the wife older than her husband in 'Twelfth Night' and 'The Tempest,' and—"

"Drama, abstract truth!" he interrupted.

"And about the jealous wife in the 'Comedy of Errors'—"

"Ah, I gave her cause, I gave her cause!" What would have been a sigh from the shadowy lips if they had had breath was wafted from them. "But come, come!" he encouraged himself. "We mustn't part so; I disowned my evil by owning it to her, and she forgave it before I died, and lived in love of me as long as I lived. How strange it all seems—like things of childhood!"

He appeared to be following beside me from the church. "I should like to say good-by in the open air, in the sun," he said; and out there it was as if his wise, kind face shone in it. "We sha'n't meet again, I'm afraid."

"Why, are you—"

"Yes, I'm going up to London, too. I don't like to

leave Bacon alone there a great while. He gets so very abjectly miserable; I can always help him pick himself up; seeing me restores him to his critical mood, to some sense of his superiority, and I want to take him back with me."

"Back?" I echoed.

"Yes. To Eternity, you know."

"Oh!" I murmured. Then I hastened to say: "There is one thing I would like a little more light on. You said a while ago that there is still consequence—suffering—expiation."

"When we revisit to Time, that is. But in Eternity not. It is something very difficult to explain. As I said, there is consequence—consequence of every sort, and, if you can understand, there is Correction, though there is no Punishment. Eternity is like a long, impersonal dream, painless because selfless. But after an immeasurable lapse in it we sometimes drift nearer and nearer to consciousness, or the wish to reindividualize. It is then, in these awakenings, that we can return to the borders of Mortality, of Time. We begin to know ourselves apart from the Pardon, from the vast forgiven Unity of souls in which we have been lost. How can I explain? We return to ourselves through such pain and shame— No! I can't make you understand. But as has been said, we are then 'let into our evils'—the evils of our separate wills and desires, which birth gave us and death purged us of. When one of us spiritual molecules, if I may so express it, comes to the painful desire for separation, for return to something like mortal consciousness, it is not suffered to leave the common Ecstasy alone; some other molecule must go with it, but this going is by choice, not by appointment."

"And you chose to leave that Bliss and return to our sorrowful earth with that poor soul!"

"Eternity is merciful; it forgives; it helps us forget;

it forgets for us; but Time cannot; it is conditioned in remembrance; it must be cruel to be kind."

"Ah, now you are speaking as I have always hoped you would—Shakespeareanly."

"Would you have liked me to quote myself?"

"No, not quote yourself exactly, but express yourself rather more in the diction of the supreme poet. Instead of that you have preferred the commonest sort of every-day prose. The other sort, if I could have reported our conversations in it, would have been more convincing. It would have proved—"

"That I wrote Shakespeare? No! It would have proved that *you* did."

He laughed with that gentle gaiety of his, but began now to be a little sad.

I was going to say something more in protest, but in that instant the generous Shade became part of the dim, religious light of the place, and I went out of the church-yard by the side gate, and down past the old mill, musing and murmuring beside its dam, and so into the sunny meadows along the Avon.

THE END